

# THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1893.

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MR. WARRENNE:  
MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

NOT MAUD!

"AND where may you be going this morning, Master Dick?" said Mr. Scudamore.

This was his invariable question every morning after breakfast; and the invariable answer was, in a tone as if it did not signify at all which way he went.

"I think I shall ride up to Erlsmede, and just look in on the Warrennes."

Then Mr. Scudamore always smiled at his sister, and she made a face and shrugged her shoulders.

"And I suppose when he has looked in on the Warrennes a little longer," said Mrs. Thorne, "he will make up his mind as to which of the two girls he likes best."

"Which of the two!" said Mr. Scudamore, as if that could admit of no doubt whatever.

"I *have* made up my mind," said Captain Scudamore.

"Oh, you have—have you!" said Mrs. Thorne; "then perhaps some day or other you will pluck up a spirit and let the young lady know your intention, or else—here we are at the end of April—time goes so fast that you won't have settled it at all before you have to go back again. These young men! It was very different when I was a girl! If a man liked you, he told you so, and there was an end of the matter."

"Eh, Dick! what's the difficulty?" said Mr. Scudamore, turning his chair round, so as to gain a view of his son's perplexed face.

"I have not yet found courage to ask her to share my fortunes; that's all," said Captain Scudamore. "It seems to me a tolerably

cool demand for a man to ask any woman to leave a happy home to follow him to an unhealthy climate, involving, as it does, so total a separation from her family and friends ; but when she is so utterly helpless, so absolutely dependent on those around her for her daily comforts——”

“Why, really, Dick !” said Mr. Scudamore, unable to keep silence any longer, “if ever there was a woman in this world thoroughly able to help herself under all circumstances, that woman is Maud Warrenne !”

“Maud ! It is Alice whom I love !” exclaimed Captain Scudamore.

“Well, I never !” ejaculated Mrs. Thorne.

“Whom I loved from the first moment I saw her !” he added with vehemence.

Mr. Scudamore sat perfectly silent, stunned by this piece of information. Dick walked up and down the room, and Mrs. Thorne sat rubbing her hands, and turning her bright eyes from one to another.

At last Mr. Scudamore, glancing compassionately at his son, as if he considered him a decided lunatic, and drawing his chair nearer his sister, said to her in an undertone :

“But what does the boy mean ? He can’t mean to marry her ! he can’t really be in love, you know, with that poor dear blind doll !”

But if he expected a coadjutor in Mrs. Thorne he was mistaken ; she adored Dick, and would by no means hear of his being thwarted in his choice.

“He shall have which he pleases !” she retorted. “If he likes the little one best, he shall have her. Little and good ! What ! I suppose everybody does not want a tall wife, do they ? As Fanny said to John Maitland : ‘What’s the use of your coming here day after day, boring me about your carriage and your horses, when I tell you that I like your brother best ?’ Blind ! I never thought she was blind ! And if she is, God made her, she did not make herself. You are like the man in the play, who says to his son’s friend, ‘Here are two ladies ; *you* shall choose ; only Bob shall choose first !’ Dick shall choose, shall he ? when you won’t let him have the little one !”

From this volley Mr. Scudamore was glad to escape ; he did not know what on earth to say : there merely remained in his head a vague idea that a blind woman could not mend her husband’s shirts. But he was too distracted to attempt anything like argument on the subject, so, after passing his hand over his forehead two or three times, he looked for his hat and stick, and addressing his son, who was still disconsolately pacing the room, he said :

“You stop here till I come back. I’m going up to Erlsmede to talk it over, and it will be a good thing if I’m the only one of the party who has made a blunder in the business.”

With these words he set off resolutely towards Mr. Warrenne’s

house, determined to seek an interview with Maud, and have the matter clearly explained. He feared that she might have interpreted his son's constant visits as he had done—he feared that Dick did not know his own mind—he feared that Alice would not return his son's regard; in short, his thoughts had never been in such a tumult since he could recollect. He hardly knew that he had reached the green gate of the Warrennes' garden, till he heard the laughing voice of Maud exclaiming:

"Eh, grandfather! you look as if you had all the cares of the world upon you this morning! All well at the Woodlands? Stop till I undraw the bolt."

She was alone, that was a comfort. She had been gathering China roses from the south wall into her straw hat, which often served her for a flower-basket, and the hand she held out to him was wet with dew.

"Well, but nothing is the matter, I hope, grandfather," she said, as she closed the gate behind him.

"Why, Queen Maud, I've made a terrible mistake—I'm almost in despair," replied Mr. Scudamore.

"But that's a pity, grandfather," said Maud; "because *I* have made one or two mistakes in my life, and I should not wonder if papa had done so too, occasionally—when he was young, you know; so that you find yourself in good company, and need not grow desperate."

"I don't think I shall ever get over it," said Mr. Scudamore; "I may fairly say that I was never so astonished in my life."

Maud, with her straw hat half full of roses, and holding it by the strings, leaned against the garden gate. Mr. Scudamore, his hands resting on the top of his stick, stood before her. She surveyed him from head to foot with her brightest glance.

"If you had but a cloak thrown over one shoulder, and a broad-leaved hat, grandfather," said she, "you would look very like the Italian count whose wife and child have just been carried up into the mountain by the bandits! Foot a little more out, and arms folded, I should recommend; but the face is admirable—fit for R—— Theatre, without a single touch of burnt cork!"

"You plague!" said Mr. Scudamore, relaxing into a smile.

"You can't frighten me, grandfather, if you mean that," said Maud.

"Alice and papa are both safe indoors; and I had a letter from Leonard this morning, in high health and spirits, dated Rome."

And diving her fingers among the roses, she drew out the letter from the crown of her hat and held it up with an air of triumph.

"You know," said Mr. Scudamore, "what I always thought of you, Maud. You know I always admired you more than anybody in the world."

He was growing serious. Maud, who hated to show emotion, tried to laugh it off.

"Dear me, grandfather; if you were but twenty—thirty say—*forty* years younger," said she, archly, "how nervous such a declaration would make me!"

"I know what your disposition is," he continued, still more earnestly, "and I should have thought your beauty would have spoken for itself."

Maud made a little courtesy.

"I am not famous for concealing my thoughts," said Mr. Scudamore, "and *you know* that when my son came over to see me, the only thing wanting to complete my happiness was that he should make you my daughter."

Maud coloured deep crimson over neck and brow. She could not deny that, however far the idea had been from her own thoughts, she was well aware it was very constantly in his. As soon as she could find her voice, she said:

"Instead of which, dear grandfather, you find that you are obliged to put up with having me for a granddaughter; the thing is not so very different. It is but one step removed."

"I could not love you better," said Mr. Scudamore, looking admiringly at her; "but I'm vexed to death, I acknowledge. I hoped it would have been otherwise—I thought he could not have helped himself."

"And you have been all this time finding it out, grandfather?" said Maud, laughing. "Any other person could not have been five minutes in our company without discovering that we regarded each other merely as very good friends."

"I could not believe it—I could not think it possible," said Mr. Scudamore, "that he should pass *you* by, and insist, like a madman, on marrying poor little Alice!"

"Alice!" said Maud, dropping her hat.

"Alice!" replied Mr. Scudamore, distinctly.

There was a very long pause. At last, Maud said in a calm tone, as if matters had grown very desperate indeed:

"Pick up my roses, please, grandfather."

Mr. Scudamore obeyed. Maud collected the roses in her hand, put on her hat and tied it. Still silent. She could not collect her ideas on the subject. Mr. Scudamore was half afraid she was feeling more than she liked to own. And, perhaps, so perverse is the nature of woman on these points, she would rather have had to refuse Captain Scudamore than to find that he had entirely overlooked her in favour of another.

At last she managed to say:

"Well, grandfather, what are we going to do next?"

"That's the thing," said Mr. Scudamore.

"You are come to ask my advice, very properly," remarked Maud.

"Let us think about it. Does Alice know it?"

"Ah! does she?" said Mr. Scudamore.



"I am taken by surprise," said Maud; "she may be equally so."

"She wouldn't think of marrying?" said he, hesitating.

"Oh, goodness no!" replied Maud with confidence. "Of course not!"

"Dick is perfectly frantic," said Mr. Scudamore.

"Foolish!" retorted Maud.

"Why, you see, Queen Maud, you don't know what it is yet," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I quite agree with you there," returned Maud—"nor Alice either."

"So I thought—so I told Dick," said Mr. Scudamore. "Why, she's a child—just out of the nursery!"

"Very true, grandfather."

"And then—blind!"

"True again," said Maud, sighing.

"Shall I tell your father?" he asked.

"Certainly! Let's have no secrets," replied Maud.

"What I'm to do about Dick, I don't know," said Mr. Scudamore.

Maud was silent. She had some misgivings as to what she was to do about Alice.

"If they have taken a fancy to each other, you know, Queen Maud," said Mr. Scudamore, as they walked towards the house, "why, there's only one thing for it."

"What's that, grandfather?" asked Maud.

"To make the best of it," he returned.

"Oh! that, of course!" said Maud. "But what else?"

"Why, to marry them."

"Alice marry!" exclaimed Maud.

"Yes, if Dick has set his heart upon it," replied Mr. Scudamore with perfect simplicity.

"That does not follow," replied Maud.

"Should you not like him for a brother?" asked Mr. Scudamore.

"Oh, vastly! Not so well as Leonard, though," she answered.

Mr. Scudamore began to whistle.

"Why, there's papa just going out of the gates," said Maud.

"Then our interview is postponed, and I'm not sorry for it," said Mr. Scudamore; "let's go in and see the child."

"This way, grandfather," said Maud, pushing open the door.

"Alice, my dear—why, the deuce! Queen Maud, here's Dick!"

"Is there, grandfather?" said Maud, darting past him into the room.

Alice rose, all trembling; Maud ran to her, and took her in her arms.

"What on earth brought you here?" asked Mr. Scudamore; "didn't I tell you to stop till I came back?"

"How could I stop?" replied Captain Scudamore.

"When will you learn to do as you are bid?" retorted Maud.

"Come, give me your good wishes," said Captain Scudamore.

"With all my heart," said Maud, accepting his offered hand; "and let me tell you, you have a much quieter bargain than if——" She paused, blushed a little, and turned to Alice.

"She likes the idea of travelling! She will go to India with me! She has not a fear—not a drawback!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore, with the greatest animation, leading his father a little on one side.

"A pretty fellow you are, to turn young ladies' heads in this way!" said Mr. Scudamore, highly delighted. Then going up to Alice, he added:

"Alice, my dear love, we must talk it over very prudently. We must not be in a hurry; we must hear what your father says."

"Come, you two, go away," said Maud, who saw that Alice trembled more and more every minute, and who did not know what her agitation would come to at last. "Papa is gone out, and you can do nothing more; and I'm sure nobody wants you here."

"What time will Mr. Warrenne return?" asked Captain Scudamore.

"Seldom much before dinner-time," said Maud. "Come in the evening."

After a good deal of leave-taking, she succeeded in turning out the visitors.

"I wonder whether I'm in my senses," said Maud, who, still sitting on the sofa, with her sister's head resting on her shoulder, was caressing the long wild tendrils of her hair. "I declare, a few minutes ago in the garden, I told Mr. Scudamore that it was altogether impossible that you could—you understand—care for Dick; but the moment I came in, and saw your face, I felt it all in a moment. I must have been stupidly blind before."

"Maud," said Alice, in a faint voice, "do you think papa will consent?"

"Why, dear Alice, he will only have one thought in the matter—your happiness—whichever way he determines."

"Then he will consent," said Alice, calmly; "or, else I shall die."

Maud looked a little frightened at this announcement, but presently thinking it was only the way lovers talked (who were hitherto a perfectly unknown species to her), she recovered her spirits.

"I'll tell you what; as to your going to India it is out of the question," said Maud; "we must keep Dick in England."

"But he must give up everything if he remains here," said Alice; "that would be too much to ask."

"He *ought* to give up everything for you," said Maud confidently.

"But how is he to live without his profession?" asked Alice.

"Oh! we must think about that," said Maud, "we can't think of everything at once."

"And you *do* like him, Maud?" said Alice.

"Extremely," replied Maud; "it is only a good thing that I don't like him too much."

"How I am to live till the evening!" said Alice, moving restlessly on the sofa.

Maud, who could no more comprehend her sister's feelings than if she had expressed them in high Dutch, did her best, however, to relieve them. She offered to read to her, to play to her; she tried to induce her to take up her work. But all in vain. Alice passed a wretched morning, her nervous restlessness growing worse every half hour.

Mr. Warrenne came in just before dinner. He talked but little at dinner-time; but his mind was frequently preoccupied, and his silence did not seem ominous to the girls.

When the cloth was removed, Alice grew paler and paler, expecting every moment that Captain Scudamore would be announced.

Her suspense was ended, however, by her father coming to sit beside her on the sofa, and saying:

"Alice, my dear, I had a visit from Captain Scudamore just before dinner, which I would not mention to you, but that I understand you are already acquainted with his preference. It was an ill-advised thing, my dear child, on his part, to let matters go so far without ascertaining whether it was possible that they could ultimately be brought about."

"Papa!" whispered Alice.

Her shortening breath terrified Maud, who looked imploringly at her father, but he seemed to judge it best to go on.

"You are hardly seventeen, my dear," he pursued; "and in such an important case it is needful that I should decide for you. I have the highest esteem and regard for Captain Scudamore, and had his choice fallen elsewhere (he glanced at Maud), I should have offered no opposition to his wishes. But picture to yourself your desolation in a distant country—strange manners, and a strange language around you, perhaps in circumstances of distress or danger—a helpless condition for any woman, but with your affliction, nothing could excuse a parent for exposing you to such a chance."

"*With him?*" faltered Alice.

"I have expressed my high opinion of him," said Mr. Warrenne; "but remember, my dear child, that he would not always remain a lover. He would naturally seek amusement in society; the more so as your deprivation would render yours more monotonous than that of most women; you would have the anguish of knowing that his enjoyments were more and more apart from you; and the torture of the completest and most helpless ignorance added to the trials: even in company with him, you would not be able to *see* how he was going on; you would be the prey to a thousand fancies which your judgment would not have the power to correct."

Alice attempted to form some words, but the power of utterance was gone. Her pallor increased, and her breath grew still shorter.

"And then, Alice," continued her father, "in a country where life is proverbially uncertain, I cannot but revert to the possibility of your losing him. In such a case, at a distance perhaps from any Europeans, your situation would be too frightful. Your means of obtaining information being so limited, you would be utterly without defence or resource. I repeat it, no parent would be justified in exposing his child to such a situation!"

All at once her breath stopped. She fell back in her father's arms. Maud uttered a cry of terror; but Mr. Warrenne, lifting her up gently, said:

"We had better get her to bed at once, my dear Maud—light me a candle—it has been a very ill-advised proceeding on the part of the young man."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### MR. REYNOLDS IS DELIGHTED.

It was impossible for Florence wholly to dislike her mother-in-law however keenly she might feel her usurpation, for the kind familiarity of her manners, and her attention to the little wants of those around her, made her almost infallibly popular. If Mr. Reynolds had shared this amiable peculiarity of his wife's, he might have won the affection and confidence of his daughter; but there was a deficiency of quick feeling about him that obscured his better qualities. A little care devoted to the securing for her a few privileges and indulgences might have been well bestowed, and would have much diminished the mortifying sense she entertained of her position in the family. She was excessively fond of riding, and there was no horse provided for her, because Mrs. Reynolds never rode on horseback; she loved the Opera, and Mr. Reynolds never once thought of taking her, because late hours and crowded assemblies were expressly forbidden to Mrs. Reynolds in her present state of health, for it was generally understood in the household that it was the intention of Mrs. Reynolds some day to add to the somewhat motley junior branches of the family. The heavy and splendid dinner-parties, which were the medium by which Mr. Reynolds and his friends enjoyed each other's society, usually concluded by half-past ten. They were entirely composed of ladies and gentlemen of a certain age; there was no music, no flirting; and Florence was always the most insignificant person in the company.

Such was the life which she had led during the month they had passed in town, and already it began to tell upon her health; her dazzling complexion was becoming paler, and she was oppressed by a feeling of *ennui*, to which she had been a comparative stranger, even

in the dull retirement of Erlsmede. Mrs. Creswick's letters became now to her a matter of pleasurable anticipation; she had learned the value of her aunt's friendship, she spoke to her with confidence of her own trials and annoyances, and received from her in return both sympathy and advice. She even began, though with some incredulity as to its beneficial effects, to adopt one of her aunt's suggestions with regard to her style of reading. Instead of depending solely on the contents of the circulating library for her mental exercises, she procured, very privately, one or two elementary works on history. Fortunately she had a very wide field before her, since her ignorance was absolutely without limits, and she was gradually becoming aware of the fact. Her father's stern reproofs had not been thrown away upon her; she felt that they were deserved, and, to a certain extent, it became her intention to supply her deficiencies. And well has Dr. Arnold declared that the intellectual is a step to moral improvement. No sooner did she begin systematically to *think*, than it occurred to her that her life for a long time past had been very base, and, strange as the assertion may appear, her first clear conceptions about the Saxon Heptarchy were a good deal interwoven with reflections upon her own want of integrity and moral dignity of principle. This gradual improvement was, of course, absolutely invisible to those who daily associated with her, and to whom such a change should have been most welcome. To Mr. Reynolds she appeared, as before, a heartless and ignorant young woman; and to Mrs. Reynolds, "a sweetly pretty creature, who she was quite sure would marry beautifully one day!"

One morning Mrs. Reynolds announced to her that they were going to have a large dinner-party that very day, and that she had done herself the pleasure of ordering Florence a blue silk dress for the occasion. It was a remarkably beautiful silk, and Florence, although she was paler than her wont, looked very lovely in it. But, while receiving the compliments of her mother-in-law with all due acknowledgments, she felt that it was a matter of perfect indifference to her how she dressed or looked in such society as that of her father's ordinary guests. She took her seat, therefore, in her accustomed corner, as much out of the way as possible, answered the few salutations that were addressed to her almost without looking up, and fell into a reverie concerning her studies of the morning until dinner should be announced. She was startled by hearing a voice, perfectly familiar to her, saying to her step-mother:

"You were always out. I began to think you did it on purpose."

"Oh! Good gracious, Mr. Reynolds, do you hear what Mr. Courtenay says?" said Mrs. Reynolds, leaning from her arm-chair towards her husband. "I, who never deny myself to anybody!"

"Mr. Courtenay is jesting," said Mr. Reynolds, gravely. "He knows that the son of my old friend would be a welcome guest to both of us."

"I want to see your children," said Mr. Courtenay. "Ada writes me that they are very beautiful."

"And you like children?"

"Excessively!"

"Goodness, how I shall like to show you mine! They *are* pretty; but I won't have you expect too much. Your sweet cousin was partial in her account."

Mr. Courtenay's only reply to this remark was an ironical smile, which might be interpreted as meaning "Very likely."

"I am having a miniature painted of my two darlings," said Mrs. Reynolds. "They were so *very* good this morning, their first sitting—did you not think so, dearest Florence?"

"Yes. I was surprised to find them so quiet," said Florence, calmly.

Mr. Courtenay turned and bowed to her. Mr. Reynolds said, with something of hesitation and constraint, which went through her heart, for it looked as if he was ashamed of her:

"Are you acquainted with my daughter, Courtenay?"

"Oh, perfectly! An acquaintance of long standing, is it not, Miss Reynolds?"

Florence bowed and made no answer. She was determined that her father should not accuse her of flirting with Mr. Courtenay.

"I don't think London agrees with dear Florence, or with any one of us," said Mrs. Reynolds, looking up at Courtenay. "I shall be quite glad when we change the air."

"It seems to me one of the foibles of the age to fancy that places don't agree with people," said Mr. Reynolds. "I have no faith in the idea. Unless there is something destructive to life in the atmosphere, I imagine that health is very little dependent upon situation."

"It must be a very fragile state of health, I should suppose," said Mr. Courtenay, to whom the remark was addressed. "I imagine that it is change of scene and not of air, which usually works the cure; but as I am never ill myself, I am a bad judge of the influence of climate upon the feelings."

"It is surprising how little gentlemen understand of these things," said Mrs. Reynolds; "now I absolutely expire in a bracing air. I mean to grow young again in Italy!"

"You must grow old first," said Mr. Courtenay, gallantly.

Dinner was announced—the company paired off, and Florence saw no more of Mr. Courtenay till the evening.

She looked for his reappearance in the drawing-room with some degree of curiosity. She *did* think that she had made some little impression upon his flinty feelings—it was provoking to find him meet her with such perfect coolness; she wondered whether he meant to keep it up all the evening—she thought she would—not flirt with him—oh! no, she had left off flirting—but just see if she could not bring him to his senses. He came in, looked for Mrs. Reynolds, and



going straight up to her, asked her to sing. She complied good-naturedly, and having tuned her guitar, threw back her clustering black curls and began in her peculiar low sweet voice to chant one of the old Spanish ballads. Courtenay, seated beside her, seemed to give himself up to the music—he begged for another song. Mrs. Reynolds complied; received his praises with a laugh, and handed him her instrument that he might put it away into its case.

The case was close to an ottoman, near which Florence was seated. She opened the lid for him, and said, with something of pique in her voice:

"I hope you have been gratified, Mr. Courtenay."

"Enchanted!" said he, drily. "And you, have you left off music?"

"For the present," said Florence, languidly; "I am tired of it."

"And London does not agree with you?" said Courtenay.

"So Mrs. Reynolds thinks," replied Florence.

"Something does not, for you are looking far from well," he remarked.

"You were always complimentary," retorted Florence.

"I suppose you never get tired of compliments," said Courtenay.

"Certainly not in your company!" said Florence.

Courtenay took a seat beside her.

"And you are not in mourning?" he said.

"Mourning—for whom?"

"For Le Grange."

"I think you have sat a little too long after dinner, Mr. Courtenay," retorted Florence. "I had no reason to regret the loss of Captain Le Grange."

"True; and if you put on mourning for all your admirers it would come expensive," said Courtenay. "It is surprising how differently people view these little accidents; some with indifference, and some with satisfaction."

"I go no farther than indifference," said Florence; "I can't pretend to regret the death of so odious a person!"

"No; but there's a friend of mine who I know will be delighted at the news. I sent him a paper directly, and told him to feel as Christian as he could about it; but I know his only regret will be that he didn't shoot the fellow himself."

"Indeed! Who may that be?"

"Young Warrenne."

"Is it possible? Was he acquainted with Captain Le Grange?"

"He never saw him, I believe."

"And why did he hate the man, then?"

"He thought that Le Grange had not behaved with proper respect to a young lady of his acquaintance."

Florence started and coloured; was it possible that Leonard had thought of her in the matter? It was not likely he could have

known that Captain Le Grange had ever aspired to her hand ; so recovering her voice and complexion, she said carelessly :

"What young lady, I wonder?"

"Nay, that's too much, Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay, rising ; "I can't betray confidence."

"Where is Ada?" said Florence, who did not like to see Courtenay moving off.

"At Weymouth."

"And when does she come back to town? I'm moped to death!"

"Not till May. I hope you may last so long."

"I think it very doubtful," replied Florence. "These people will be the end of me."

"Don't you like the orange-coloured judge?" asked Courtenay ; "he is a single man."

"Gracious me! I hope not!" exclaimed Florence ; for the orange-coloured judge had taken her to dinner two or three times, and she feared that it might be a preliminary to making himself particularly agreeable.

"Have you forgotten how to say 'No'?" asked Courtenay, laughing at her look of dismay.

"Oh! of course not," said Florence ; "only I always fancied people of that sort were married."

"I have heard some women declare that it was so difficult to refuse a man," said Courtenay, laughing.

"Sometimes," said Florence, thinking of her father's last admonitions as she spoke.

"Under what circumstances?" asked Courtenay.

"I shall not tell you," returned Florence, smiling ; "I shall leave you to find out."

"I trust that the lady to whom I next declare myself may experience great difficulty in saying 'No,'" said Courtenay.

"And I trust she may say it the very first word!" replied Florence, playfully.

"*Nous verrons*," said Courtenay, bowing, as he backed from the sofa.

The visitors were taking leave—Mrs. Reynolds waited until the door closed upon the last, and then exclaimed, her whole face beaming with animation :

"I like him excessively! I quite dote upon him. My dear Florence, I don't wonder at you! Did you hear what he said of my dear children?"

Florence turned to her mother-in-law with a bewildered air.

"Mrs. Reynolds, you are rather premature," said Mr. Reynolds, looking however with much complacency at his pretty wife ; "but I believe we are all of one opinion with respect to Mr. Courtenay. He is a young man whose principles and conduct are so excellent that I confess it would be beyond my hopes if he were to turn his thoughts to—to any one in the present company."

As there was only one person in the company to whom he could with any show of propriety direct his thoughts, Florence blushed, but said coldly, "that, as far as she was concerned, she did not join in the flattering opinions just pronounced of Mr. Courtenay; that she imagined him to entertain very undue notions of his own importance, and to be, moreover, one of the most unamiable persons she had ever seen."

"Oh, Florence! Florence!" said Mrs. Reynolds, archly.

"Your manner to that gentleman this evening did not pass unnoticed," said Mr. Reynolds, sternly; "and you will permit me to observe that your acquaintance with him is not yet sufficiently intimate to admit of your forming an opinion upon his qualities—which, I am glad to know, you have much undervalued."

"I hope he'll call to-morrow, with all my heart!" said Mrs. Reynolds, holding out her hand for her candlestick.

Florence was following, when a look from her father arrested her.

"I do not mean to defend pride as a sentiment," he said, "but if any one may be excused for a feeling of self-esteem, it is Mr. Courtenay. Some persons are proud of their ancient birth, and some of having been the founders of their own fortunes; but he has both these causes for self-esteem, since his descent is high, and he has restored the fortunes of his house by his own industry. I confess it would be beyond my most sanguine wishes if—good night, my dear."

With this unusually kind farewell Florence was suffered to retire—a little disturbed at the view her father seemed to entertain of Mr. Courtenay's merits; but consoled when she reflected that of all women in the world she was the least likely to receive an offer of his good gifts.

"He will marry some excessively worthy creature, of course," thought Florence, as Louise was undressing her, "very ugly, as those good people invariably are; but he won't mind that—I never saw a person so careless about beauty; and in my life I never met any one so unmanageable, so perversely self-willed. Marry! I would rather marry poor Captain Le Grange of the two—I should never have a moment's peace as the wife of Mr. Courtenay!"

"I am quite disappointed," said Mrs. Reynolds, when her husband came in to luncheon, "to find that charming Mr. Courtenay has not been to call this morning—I know it is too early as yet, but I thought as I mentioned the children, he would have dropped in while they were sitting for their pictures, he would have helped to amuse them, little darlings!"

Florence raised her eyes from her plate and looked hard at Mrs. Reynolds, to see whether she was in earnest in supposing that Mr. Courtenay would unbend the calm frigidity of his manners for the diversion of her children, who were now eating their cold chicken and mashed potatoes at the luncheon table; but she said nothing, and as

soon as she had finished her jelly, she left her father and his wife to discuss their plans together.

Mrs. Reynolds soon joined her in the drawing-room.

"We are absolutely alone to-day, my dear Florence—a family party at dinner. A little rest is good for us both, my love, for you do begin to look fagged, and I am a perfect object!"

"I have no objection to dining alone," said Florence, who found a space left for her in the conversation, where she was expected to say something.

"You see, my love," pursued Mrs. Reynolds, "that London not agreeing with us, and my health not being now so strong as I hope, please God, it will be, I have been talking to Dr. B—— a good deal before luncheon, and he says that we can't do better than go to Baden for the summer, and then straight on to Italy when the weather grows a little chilly."

A flash of joy lit up the face of Florence. To Italy! away from all these tedious people—out of reach of Mr. Courtenay whom her father was bent on adoring, and the orange-coloured judge, who began to be so very civil,—to Italy, where she might perhaps meet with Leonard, whose image became dearer to her every day, as she contrasted it with the people with whom she was doomed to associate. Oh! why could they not go to Italy at once, instead of lingering at a German Spa, when if they delayed, Leonard would be in all probability set forward on his more distant travels?

"And Mr. Reynolds," pursued Mrs. Reynolds, little guessing how fast her hearer's thoughts were voyaging—"Mr. Reynolds, with his usual kindness, subscribes entirely to the wishes of Dr. B——: and only suggests that as I am but delicate, we should leave the two darlings with Mrs. Creswick during our absence. And here is Mr. Courtenay, I do declare, whom I had absolutely given up!"

"Given up at four o'clock?" said Mr. Courtenay, coming leisurely into the room. "What are your hours?"

"I was thinking of the children," said Mrs. Reynolds; "shall I ring for them?"

"I came to see Mr. Reynolds this morning," said Courtenay; "they showed me into the wrong room."

"Mr. Reynolds?" asked Mrs. Reynolds.

"A little matter of business," returned Courtenay.

Mrs. Reynolds rang the bell.

"Shall we see you again?" she asked, as the servant appeared to conduct Mr. Courtenay to Mr. Reynolds' study.

"I don't know—if I can," replied Courtenay bowing to both ladies.

"How you can like that man, Mrs. Reynolds, is a mystery to me," observed Florence, taking up her embroidery.

"Ah, ah!" said Mrs. Reynolds, nodding her head.

"I'm serious," returned Florence.

"Are you really?" said Mrs. Reynolds. "Such a very fine young man; so dignified, and so very well off. I can't believe you, Florence—I really cannot!"

Florence made a contemptuous gesture, and applied herself to her work.

In about half an hour Mr. Reynolds came in, took up his station on the hearth-rug, and looked benignantly at his wife and daughter.

He was supremely pleased at something, that was evident; but he seemed to pause a little for words.

"I confess myself deeply gratified by Mr. Courtenay's visit to-day," he said at length: "gratified, and touched by the very flattering terms in which he solicited an alliance with my family. You have been selected, Florence, by no common person."

"I!" exclaimed Florence, turning as white as her handkerchief.

"Oh! Florence, Florence! after all you said!" cried Mrs. Reynolds.

"It is beyond my hopes," said Mr. Reynolds, looking even more tall and grim than usual; "principle, birth, fortune! I see nothing left to wish for. I need not say that my unqualified consent was warmly given. It strikes me as something remarkable that Mr. Courtenay, endowed with so many advantages, should desire a connection with my family. He might have looked higher in every sense, and I trust that, as from circumstances which I am about to mention, the marriage cannot take place till next year, you will employ the intervening time in diligently improving your mind and character."

One ray of hope seemed to sustain Florence beneath this intelligence. She might meet Leonard Warrenne in Italy. Nothing could be more vague than her chance of meeting him; for she might be at Pisa, while he was at Naples; and if they met, she might not be able to summon back the feelings which he had once professed for her; but she hoped, she did not stay to reason.

"You share my feelings, Mrs. Reynolds, I am sure," pursued her husband; "you rejoice at this unexpected piece of good fortune. Courtenay dines here to-day."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Reynolds. "Dear Florence, I congratulate you."

"It's rather sudden, isn't it?" she said, passing her hand over her eyes.

"What am I to understand by that remark?" asked Mr. Reynolds, with an expression of great surprise in his countenance.

Florence trembled.

"We go abroad in a fortnight," pursued Mr. Reynolds; "and Courtenay informs me with regret that it is out of his power to accompany us. As the marriage could not take place in that time, I am compelled to defer the event until our return."

"Thank Heaven!" thought Florence.

"When Courtenay returns to dinner," added Mr. Reynolds, "I

have only to inform him of your acquiescence in the proposal he has done you the honour to make. I told him as much before, but not having then apprised you of the fact, it will require that confirmation. Need I say," he added, offering his hand to his daughter, "that I congratulate you, and I trust you may deserve your good fortune."

The party then dispersed to dress. Florence, alternately hot and cold, was oppressed in turn by fear and indignation. With one slight reservation she had no hope left: she knew her father by this time. And to be won unsought! To be supposed to be grateful for the condescending offer of Mr. Courtenay! She almost longed to see him once again, that she might try to guess by his manner what he could be dreaming about. She was soon gratified in this particular.

Mr. Courtenay entered, as they were all sitting round the fire before dinner, with his usual self-possession, shook hands with the whole party, and then, taking a seat on the sofa beside Mrs. Reynolds, caught up one of the children on his knee, and made room for the other among the sofa cushions, to the great delight of their mother.

It was not until the evening, when the children were gone to bed, and Mrs. Reynolds was making tea, that Mr. Courtenay crossed over to Florence, and drawing his chair quietly close to hers, said, with the most perfect composure:

"I learn from your father, Miss Reynolds, that you have done me the honour to receive favourably the proposals which I made to him this morning."

What would Florence have given to be able to tell him all she thought of him and his proposals; but although her father was quite on the other side of the room, she felt as if his eyes were upon her, and she merely bowed her head.

"Allow me to express to you the sense I entertain of your goodness," said Mr. Courtenay, without in the slightest degree taking the trouble to appear as if he meant it; "and my regret that you leave England so shortly after an arrangement that gives me such entire satisfaction."

"Heaven send," thought Florence, "that I may be beyond your power before I return!"

However, as it was almost necessary for her to make some remark in return for so much civility, she forced herself to say, as he rose to reach her tea-cup:

"We go abroad in a fortnight."

"Do you like travelling?" he asked.

"I have hardly tried," said Florence; "we were so very quiet, you know, at Erlsmede."

"What a delightful spot it is; I should like to live there, should not you?"

"No, not much," said Florence, giving back her cup, and sinking into the corner of the sofa.



"I wish that I could spare the time to join you at Rome," said Mr. Courtenay. "You will be absent all the winter, I think?"

"Yes, I believe so," replied Florence.

"And how do you mean to amuse yourself?"

Florence sighed. Then she began to turn over in her mind how it would be possible to learn from Courtenay what his friend Leonard's plans were; it was difficult to put the question, because she felt so conscious. Two or three times she was about to make a beginning, and as often she stopped, fearful lest her manner should betray her interest.

At last, Courtenay, who had sat silent for some time playing with the long silken tassel of a hand-screen that lay on the cushions, looked up suddenly, and said:

"Young Warrenne is in Sicily, or you might have happened to meet; one stumbles so oddly upon one's acquaintance in travelling."

The colour flew to her face and then faded away, leaving her so deadly pale, that Mrs. Reynolds, who was passing the sofa, stooped to the ear of her step-daughter, and whispered:

"My dear, has he been asking you to name the day?"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### MR. WARRENNE CONSENTS.

FOR several weeks after Captain Scudamore's unsuccessful interview with Mr. Warrenne, Maud was afraid that Alice was going to make good her declaration, and die, for she drooped more and more every day. But there was no wilfulness mingled with her weakness. Her sensibilities were concentrated by her blindness; and therefore she was slower than another in recovering from the shock they had received. And something of the pride that still lingered, very improperly, in the Warrenne family, made her strain every nerve to conceal her sufferings. The idea that any one could think she was dying of love, filled her with dismay, and she returned feebly to her family occupations, as if in the hope that their monotony might fill up the blank that Captain Scudamore's absence had made in her life.

Perhaps, after the principals, Mrs. Thorne took this disastrous turn of events more to heart than any one else. She several times offered valiantly to accompany the young people to India, if Mr. Warrenne could thereby be induced to trust Alice to Dick's protection. She stipulated, indeed, for Jack Robins, because she was sure that she never could endure to be waited upon by the natives. This proposal not exactly meeting the views of the people concerned, she was now and then tempted to call Alice a "little humbug," and to insinuate that she was not deceived by persons who set up for being blinder than their neighbours; in testimony whereof she adduced one Jane

Cowper, of whom she had heard, though no one else had, that she feigned for some years to be totally deaf and dumb. But in the main, she was very sorry for Alice, and thought her father very hard upon her; for, as she remarked, "Not one man in fifty would have taken a fancy to a blind girl, if she *was* blind; and now the poor thing gets an offer, she is not allowed to accept it!"

As for Mr. Scudamore, he always held the idea on every subject as long as he could, that "things would come right at last;" and so, though he felt that he could not controvert one of Mr. Warrenne's opinions and arguments on the affair, he saw his son set off for London to make arrangements for his return to India, with the vague presentiment that when he did set sail, it would be in company with Alice.

It was a melancholy time for Maud. Her sister's wretchedness was too apparent. It would be better for them all when Dick was fairly gone; there might be some hope then of his being forgotten.

One morning Mr. Scudamore came into the garden by way of the green gate as usual, and finding Maud at work among the rose trees, made his way towards her.

"How's the child?" he asked, as soon as he came within speaking distance.

This was his regular question now. Maud knit her brow a little.

"Much as usual, grandfather; she has gone to take a little walk with papa."

"Gone out walking, is she? When will she be back?"

"I don't know," returned Maud, rather abruptly.

She went on gathering her dead roses. Mr. Scudamore paced backwards and forwards, making several sounds of impatience.

"How you do fidget, grandfather!" said Maud, at last.

"I have got something I want to tell the child," said Mr. Scudamore, at last.

This was too much for Maud. Down went her basket and scissors. She stepped into the middle of the path, just before Mr. Scudamore, with flashing eyes.

"I tell you what, grandfather, this won't do!" she exclaimed; "if Dick chooses to prefer Alice, it's very well; I've no objection: but if *you* begin to like her better than me—I'll—I'll—I'll not forgive you!"

A hearty peal of laughter was all the reply Mr. Scudamore could make at first to this attack.

"Very pretty, indeed, Mistress Maud," he said, as soon as he could speak. "I shall grow vain in my old age!"

"Tell me your news directly, then!" she said.

"Why, so I would, you vixen," he replied; "only it happened to concern Alice more than you, and was more likely to interest her."

"What is it—this moment?" urged Maud.

"Why, then, Queen Maud," replied Mr. Scudamore, "Dick, who you know went up to town about his passage, *won't* go."

She made something like an effort to echo his last words, and stood breathless.

"Not a foot!" continued Mr. Scudamore. "He won't go! While Alice lives, he says he won't leave England, and I'm glad of it; he retires on his pension, he will stay with me at the Woodlands, we shall manage very well together. Eh, he loves the child, you see, too well to give her up. I think it is the best thing he could do, for my part!"

Maud was in tears.

"What do you say, Queen Maud? What do you think?" said Mr. Scudamore, as he led her slowly up and down the walk.

"Oh! grandfather, I am so happy!"

"Your father can't refuse her now," said Mr. Scudamore. "She will almost be under his own roof! What is it to the Woodlands? Not half-a-mile, I do believe!"

It was a remarkably long half-mile; but the precise distance did not signify.

"So, you see, Queen Maud," said Mr. Scudamore, "I was right in saying my news concerned Alice more than you!"

"Not a bit more," retorted Maud. "Always tell me everything first, grandfather!"

"And here they come!" said Mr. Scudamore: "and here are Dick's letters. We shall see now whether Mr. Warrenne will withhold his consent!"

Mr. Warrenne's consent was duly forwarded by return of post; and so ended the romantic half of Alice's attachment.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A FIT OF DEPRESSION.

FLORENCE was perfectly right in her estimate of Mr. Courtenay's character when she said that it was impossible to find any one more perversely self-willed. But, however little flattered she was by his selection of herself, perhaps she would have been still less so, had she known that it arose entirely from that very perverseness she so much dreaded. Unable to succeed in gaining the regard of the only woman who had really touched his heart, he was very careful to go into the opposite extreme, and to choose one for whom it was impossible that he could feel any affection at all. He was far too wise to place his fate in the hands of the capricious Florence, and he had, therefore, without trying to learn her sentiments on his behalf, secured at once the powerful intervention of her father.

He had now to communicate his success to the Thomasons, who had returned from their tour, rather unexpectedly, a few days after his engagement. He breakfasted with them as usual, the morning after

their return, and while the ladies were giving him a detailed account of their excursions, Mr. Thomason seemed occupied in glancing over his letters and papers. He looked through two or three business-looking documents, and then breaking the seal of a more aristocratic missive, scanned it hastily, and then said to his daughter :

"Another offer, Ada. I am really ashamed of always having to give the same answer. Do try to be more lenient."

"*Les beaux yeux de ma cassette*," said Ada, reaching out her hand, not for the letter, but for a plate of fancy bread on the table.

"And what am I to say, my dear?"

"As usual," replied Ada, hardly attending to the question, and turning to ask her cousin for the butter.

"I think, my dear, you might, as he says, give him the opportunity of seeing more of you," remarked Mrs. Thomason, who was, in her turn, reading the letter : "it is hard upon the poor man not to have the chance of making himself acceptable."

"Never take a man upon trial, my dear mamma," said Ada ; "they always fancy themselves so furiously ill-used when you turn them off again ; don't they, Charles?"

"How should I know?" returned her cousin. "Haven't I told you that I should be sure to go about these things differently from other people?"

"And who is the man, after all?" asked Ada, holding out her hand, at last, for the letter, and glancing down at the signature. "J. Sterling? I hardly know him by sight! I don't think I meet him anywhere scarcely. I had rather hoped it had been Mr. Roxby : to *souffler* him from Mrs. Liversege would have been rather a triumph. That is the reason I let him dance with me so often on the Wednesday before we left town! Did you observe us, Charles?—for he dances so very badly—quite out of time, you know!"

"Ah! you are all alike, you women," said Mr. Courtenay, drily. "Almost all," he added, after a moment's pause.

"Almost! of course, there is some bright exception," said Ada, pouring herself a cup of coffee ; "a particular star, who has none of the foibles of her sex, and remarkably fine eyes into the bargain."

"Certainly," he replied, quietly ; "you are perfectly correct in your supposition."

"I have thought Charles in love, lately," said Mrs. Thomason, with a sigh.

"Perhaps you were never more mistaken in your life!" said Mr. Courtenay, drily. "I am going to be married, and that is quite enough at one time : no need, I am sure, to be in love also!"

"You, Charles!" cried Ada.

"Myself," he returned, with his usual coolness.

"Well, then, I'm very glad to hear you say so, at last!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason ; "and I've often wondered why you hadn't married over and over again ; so much sought as you are in society, and so

earnestly as your poor, dear father has begged and prayed of you to do so ; and after your poor, dear brother's sad fate, I am sure nobody in the world could blame him for being a little anxious to see you happily married and settled ! and when a young man has enough and to spare, as you have, if you liked to marry ten wives, there could not be the slightest objection ! You could afford it, thank Heaven ! And all I hope is, Charles, that we shall have no long engagements, but that everything will be put in hand as soon as possible, and then poor, dear Mr. Courtenay will be made happy at last !”

After this incoherent address, Mrs. Thomason wiped her eyes, and took a muffin upon her plate.

“I entirely agree with you, Mrs. Thomason,” said Mr. Courtenay, drily. “If I intended to establish myself at Pera, the ten wives would be perfectly *selon les règles*. It is quite impossible to have too much of a good thing ; but, as my views are moderate, I relinquish my claim upon the other nine. I also believe that *poor, dear Mr. Courtenay* is the only person who will be very much delighted with the present arrangement, unless it is the lady's father ; but we must recollect that there are marriages which please nobody. Mine will have the advantage of contenting the lookers-on. And with regard to long engagements, though I cordially echo your sentiments, and am in a great hurry myself, yet, unhappily, the match cannot come off till next year.”

“And who is the lady, Charles ?” asked Ada, impatiently.

“Miss Reynolds,” returned Courtenay, handing his cup to his cousin. “I don't see why you should keep all the good things to yourself this morning. You may give me some more coffee ?”

“Dear me !” exclaimed Mrs. Thomason ; “why, I never thought you liked her ! Surely, Charles—well, it's very odd—I suppose I made a mistake.”

“I hardly believe he's in earnest,” said Ada, looking perplexed.

“It is a very suitable match, and I congratulate you with all my heart,” said Mr. Thomason. “Mr. Reynolds is a man of large fortune, his daughter cannot fail to have something handsome.”

“Yes ; and I want money so much,” said Mr. Courtenay, who had received all the remarks on his approaching happiness with exactly the same imperturbable expression of countenance.

“Well, now, I always thought Charles would have married somebody without a shilling,” said Ada. “I can't in the least make out his reasons for this match !”

“Can't you ? Your mamma has given you a whole string of them—enough even for a woman—and in such variety !”

“I don't know. I can't fancy you attached to her,” said Ada ; “and somehow I don't particularly wish to have Miss Reynolds for a cousin-in-law.”

“That is a sufficient plea, I am sure, for breaking off the affair,” said Mr. Courtenay, in a quiet tone.

"Good gracious, my dear Ada, don't let us hear a word against it!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason, in a great bustle; "here, after all this delay and vexation, Charles has fixed upon somebody at last, and let us keep him to it, if we can. Poor, dear Mr. Courtenay! I only wish we were down in Devonshire now to witness his joy. It must be a great delight to see your only child married. Of course, Charles, you have had time to write to your father and receive his answer? Ada, we call the very first thing on the bride-elect, remember."

"I rather wanted Charles to go with me to the National Gallery this morning," said Ada.

"Nonsense, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason. "You must not expect your cousin to be at your beck and call now that he is going to be married; you must find somebody in your turn."

"I'll escort you with all my heart," said Mr. Courtenay quickly; "why shouldn't we go?"

"Indeed, I won't hear of it!" cried Mrs. Thomason.

"It would be a great want of respect to Miss Reynolds to be flourishing about with another young lady, even though she is your cousin. I often think," she added, with a deep sigh, "that the world is coming to an end."

"I'm sure we won't hasten the catastrophe," said Mr. Courtenay, taking up his hat. "But never mind, Ada, we will defer our visit to the Gallery for a few days, and then the coast will be clear, for Miss Reynolds will be out of England."

So the Thomasons went to leave their cards upon Miss Reynolds, for she was out driving with her step-mother, and then returned to see their own company.

"It is a wonder to me," said Ada, seated near the bow-window in the inner drawing-room, with a book half-closed in her lap, "how anybody can go about making calls such a delicious day as this. If I had my own way, mamma, I should be in Richmond Park, lunching under the trees."

The remark could not be called personal, for there was nobody then in the room but Sir Frederic Manning, who often dropped in of a morning, and went wandering about the room, without taking much notice of anybody.

"Ah! my dear," sighed Mrs. Thomason, "when you know the world a little better, you will learn the claims that society has on your time. People can't spend their lives in Richmond Park!"

Ada did not reply. The muslin curtains swung to and fro in the breeze, and the branches of the creepers, which were trained against the windows, floated backwards and forwards.

At last Sir Frederic came in front of Ada's chair, and standing still, with his arms folded, looked down upon her attentively.

"Clever fellow, that cousin of yours," he said.

"Charles? Oh, very!" replied Ada.



"If he chose that attitude, he ought to have been a sculptor," said Sir Frederic, pointing to the statue of Ruth.

"He had something to do with it," returned Ada. "He made W—— alter the left arm, which was a little raised; the hand is now on the ground."

"I see; very good—very right," said Sir Frederic; "that left hand and arm I think equal to anything in modern sculpture."

"Do you?" returned Ada, carelessly. "I'm tired of it now. I liked it very much at first—the statue altogether, I mean."

"It only shows now what prejudices govern society," said Sir Frederic; "here is this statue, which I admire solely as a work of art, entirely as a beautiful piece of sculpture, and yet if I were to ask permission to have a copy made of it, I should be looked upon as a madman—it would be a thing unheard of."

Mrs. Thomason had gone out of the room for some fresh worsteds—Ada had to answer the question herself.

"Because," she said, speaking with some effort, "though to you it is merely a good statue, other people would recollect it was the portrait of an individual."

"That's the point," said Sir Frederic. "'Other people' often stand in the way of our wishes—and it is singular that we should defer so much to the opinions of those who, though they have the power to make us uncomfortable, have neither the power nor the will to make us happy!"

"I am sure," said Ada, trying to laugh, "that were it not for those same 'other people,' papa would gladly oblige you in this particular. He is not fond enough of works of art to be stingy of them."

"Well," said Sir Frederic, looking round and perceiving that Mrs. Thomason had disappeared, "I start for Rome to-morrow morning, oblige me by making my adieux to Mrs. Thomason."

Ada could hardly echo the words "for Rome," before he had made his departing bow, and his step was heard rapidly descending the stairs.

He had succeeded in convincing her of his perfect indifference, at any rate. It almost seemed as if his visit had no other aim. She tried to reason with herself for a little while, and then, stooping her head upon her hands, she gave way to a perfect shower of tears.

"Eh! What's the matter now?" said the voice of her cousin, after she had employed a few minutes in this manner.

"Nothing; don't bore me, Charles! I'm only depressed," said Ada, raising her head.

"Only depressed," repeated her cousin; "you are surrounded by luxury and indulgence, you have health and youth, your parents idolize you, and because you are troubled with a passing headache, or put out in some trifling scheme of amusement, you give way to tears, and talk of being *depressed*! But this is the way with women! I

thank Heaven there is no woman living whose tears could influence me. I know what they are worth."

Ada's flowed faster at this exordium. Courtenay stood beside her, looking uneasy.

"Yet, if you have any cause of distress (which you can't have)," he added, drawing a chair quickly beside hers, and seating himself, "you know how gladly I would exert myself in your behalf."

Ada put her hand into his, struggling to subdue her emotion. He sat beside her quietly waiting till she should be able to explain herself.

"You see, Charles——," she began; then, after a pause, she added hastily: "What was the prejudice Sir Frederic had taken against me?"

"Oh, Sir Frederic!" returned Mr. Courtenay, as if entirely enlightened as to the cause of her tears. "I don't in the least know to what you refer."

"At our ball in the winter, it was you who told me!" exclaimed Ada.

Mr. Courtenay remained holding his chin for a moment; then recalling the circumstance, he replied:

"Ah! he said he would never dance with a woman of fortune again, that was it; and so I could not with propriety introduce you to him as a partner."

"That was very absurd!" exclaimed Ada.

"Excessively," returned her cousin.

"He has been here very often, Charles, since then," murmured Ada, breaking afresh into sobs.

"Has he? So much the worse," said Courtenay.

"And now he says he is going to Rome," added Ada, almost inaudibly.

"So much the better," returned her cousin.

"What have you to say against him?" asked Ada, looking up suddenly.

"Everything," said Mr. Courtenay.

"I don't believe a word of it!" cried Ada indignantly.

"Then I need not trouble myself to go into detail," said Mr. Courtenay, with perfect coolness.

"No," replied Ada, starting from her chair, "for I am going directly to papa to beg him to accept Mr. Sterling, if he has not already written."

Ada was in a passion.

"By all means," said her cousin, looking after her as she flew from the room, "since the refusal went three hours ago."

"Where's Ada?" asked Mrs. Thomason, as she entered.

"Gone off in a rage," he replied.

"No!" exclaimed that lady, sinking into her chair.

"Fact," replied Courtenay, walking to the window.

"Charles, I want to speak to you seriously," said Mrs. Thomason.

"Eh?" said he, coming up to her.

"I have been puzzling for a long time about Ada," said Mrs. Thomason; "it is so very odd her refusing every offer that is made her one after the other in this way; now is it not, Charles?"

"Very singular," he replied.

"Do you know, I half fancied that you were the cause of it," pursued Mrs. Thomason, "and it made me very uneasy."

Mr. Courtenay bowed.

"Of course, I mean, Charles, because you are cousins, and because you did not seem to think of Ada; I could have no other objection, you know."

Mr. Courtenay bowed again.

"But I watched her when you announced your engagement—I am sure I have not half congratulated you yet—and I saw that she did not take it in that light."

"Ah!" said he.

"Well now, Charles, tell me candidly what you think of Sir Frederic Manning?"

"My dear aunt, he is one of those inconvenient people who possess a kind heart and a bad head."

"And did not somebody tell us he was in difficulties?" pursued Mrs. Thomason.

"They told you very true," said Mr. Courtenay; "his estate is mortgaged to a terrible extent."

"Then I'll tell you what, Charles," said Mrs. Thomason, with an air of great sagacity, "he will not do for Ada; and I shall take very good care not to be at home when he calls, nor to send him any invitations to our parties—eh?"

"You could not do better, my dear Mrs. Thomason," replied Mr. Courtenay gravely; "and as you are fond of proverbs, I can give you one that is very applicable to the present occasion, 'When the steed is stolen, shut the stable-door.'"

*(To be continued.)*

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## A SEAFARER'S HOME.

By F. A. FULCHER.

**T**RULY a seafarer amongst birds is the little whistling pipit of the rocks.

All the year round, come weal or woe, come rain to polish the pebbles and reveal their hidden depths, or drought to dry the sea tangles and blazen the cliff with poppies; come clouds scudding, and waves hurtling, or light vapours floating overhead, while summer ripples croon along the shore; come what will, come what may, the rock-pipit is always at home in his boulder-strewn pebbly domain.

For the rock-pipit has never taken to the wandering ways of the travelling birds, whose fashion it is to spend the winter here and the summer there; to go south with the swallows and invalids, or north to the moors with plovers and sportsmen, or to Scandinavia with the fieldfares, and redwings, and fishermen, hooded-crows, snow-buntings, North-West passage explorers, bramble-finches and the rest of the north-wending travellers.

Here, there, and everywhere, go migrants and tourists nowadays, but the rock-pipit keeps the even tenor of his way, unmoved by the nightingales who rest on his borders in the spring, and sing of tempting swarms of dainty insects they have left on the edge of Sahara sands; or the wheatears, who whisper of corn in Egypt; even the family traditions of his cousin, the tree-pipit, cannot lure him from home.

He keeps open house in the winter, when numberless arctic birds, frozen out of their home in the lands where winter is proverbially inhospitable, come to sojourn with him. The shore-larks, with their fine manners and handsome yellow throats, and the turnstones, who make free with his stores, nearly eat him out of house and home at times. Then, indeed, but only when he has shared his last crust with them, the rock-pipit has to take his guests up the cliff and out to the fields where the meadow birds live, in search of seeds and worms. But he never strays more than a mile from his home on the shore, and soon wearies of the dulness of these inland excursions; it is well-known among the land birds that it is hopeless to try to keep him.

By the end of April, the ogre which held the northern countries fast bound in iron bands has departed, no one knows whither; but the rock-pipit's visitors are free to return; yet they cannot induce the rock-pipit to pay them even a flying visit in return for his hospitality; nothing will persuade him to leave home for a day.

Such a beautiful home! so full of treasure and wonderment; rich with gems from ocean depths; strewn with flowers of the cliffs; gay with the wings of flashing gulls; musical with the songs of the larks

above and the waves below ; all the glory of sea and sky is shed here, all the awe of powers beyond our ken rests here. No wonder the bird loves it.

His delicate black legs and long-toed slender feet run nimbly over some of the choicest treasures of the world's museum. Here lie among the common stones many of those handsome choanites which so well repay the collector of natural bric-a-brac by showing marbled depths of fine colour and crystal clearness when polished, and the curious form of the animal encased in this gorgeous sarcophagus. You may scarcely know them among the stones of the beach till you learn the secret of the tiny clear specks that appear on their rough surfaces, and the spot where the cylindrical body of the choanite, which runs through the pebble, shows in a round patch at either end. The rock-pipit dare not have them polished or they would soon all be stolen from him, except now and then when it rains or storm-spray beats high, for then few pass his way, and his treasures are safe. His choicest gems are disguised and hidden in rough cases.

Learn the secret of another of his safes. Some of those round nodules of flint, opaque and valueless to all appearance, are diamond mines. Search till you find one with a tiny hole in its surface, running deep to the centre, break it open, and the chances are ten to one it contains a glittering mass of crystals gathered in the beautiful form of the branching sponge, which first collected them to itself, and which has long since disappeared. Some of these nodules contain crystals of pure white, some of pink, others of brown, and grey, and yellow ; very lovely are all of them.

The old shepherds on the downs above, where also many are found, call them "noodles," and I have been told by them that they are the swedes and turnips which the Romans planted hereabouts, petrified and crystallised ; but the rock-pipit doubtless has studied that complex system of old time sponges and knows better, or he would not collect them.

Fossils too, innumerable, are buried in the rocks here ; often the walls of the crevice in which the little green bird makes its round and bulky nest of coarse grass is studded with the remains of the dwellers in some ocean long since dried up or run away. The finely-shaped nautilus, beautifully formed ammonites of many kinds, sea-urchins traced over with delicate geometrical patterns, shells and fish of many varied kinds lie buried in the great mausoleums of the rocks. They too, though, lie hidden, and only betray their presence where one small portion is exposed on some storm-rent or water-worn surface. But this is quite sufficient to guide the seeker to them ; the rest can be unearthed with chisel and hammer, and care. Wondrously beautiful in symmetry of form are some of these creatures of bygone ages ; their like is almost solely now existent among the creatures of very deep sea soundings, the last remnants of types and races which are slowly dying out in the darkness of fathomless ocean bottoms.

In what lies the fascination of the past that its relics attract us so irresistibly? A tiny shell half hidden by chalk or mud come down to us from a thousand thousand years away; a piece of old rag from the poor mummy of nobody knows who; a chip of brick from an old wall; a scrap of old vellum penned by some unknown hand: these, of no beauty, of no intrinsic value, have nevertheless grown sacred by the flight of years, and we value them and ponder over them and make our speculations, possibly very far from the truth, with as much favour as though they were some exquisite specimen of Etruscan art or the rolls which hold the story of a nation.

But I doubt much if this has struck the rock-pipit. He takes life as it comes, and the treasures that lie lavish around him he questions not.

There are beautiful living things in this home of his too. No need for the rock-pipit to pick flowers and bring hither to decorate his pasture as those curious birds the bower-builders do. The spring lays out his garden for him, and while the bower-bird's flowers die as fast as he plants them, the rock-pipit's pleasure is gay all through the summer.

Over the pebbles purple tassels of sea-pea trail their green leaves after them. There is an old legend that this small plant arrived miraculously in some time of famine to afford food for a starving people; but, if this be so, its little size and bitter taste must cruelly have mocked them. Close to it grows sea silene, short of stalk and single flowered, with grey-green leaves and the swelled seed-cup with purple veinings. The yellow-horned poppy comes up golden crowned, like a king among flowers, wherever wind-blown dust has clung to the rock. Tufts of pink thrift and bosses of saxifrage, sprays of wild rose, blue harebells, white lychnis and wall-flower blown from some distant garden, or brought by the birds, come up on these patches of soil. Wild mignonette, waving tamarisk, bachelor's buttons, and sea-holly, with its fine, blue flowers and handsome leaves, all these grow up the cliff under the sunny skies that shine blue in the heavens above and bluer still in the seas below where the rock-pipit dwells.


There are sea flowers on the beach, thrown up by every tide even in summer; but in winter there come such masses on storm-driven waves, that great banks of seaweed lie along the shore. Sometimes the poor come to glean this harvest, and throw it on the land to enrich it; sometimes they dig pits, and burn it to make kelp; sometimes it is theirs to keep or to sell; sometimes they earn good wages in harvesting it for an employer. In either case it is in two senses a windfall, and adds many an extra gain to their regular earnings.

Some of the seaweeds thrown up on his estate are of the most delicate colours—pink, and mauve, and scarlet—but the greater masses are of a uniform brownish-green, and these it is that must have taught the rock-pipit what to wear. For it is the fashion among all pipits to adopt a mimetic style of dress. The tawny pipit of arid



deserts in the East wears a sandy, yellow suit ; the tree-pipit of our woods is clad in a sober brown, just the hue of the boughs in which he perches ; the meadow-pipit is scarcely noticeable in the ploughed lands and fallow fields which he loves ; the pipit of the rocks wears olive-green so like the colour of the seaweeds that gather slimy and slippery over their surface, that he may defy even the keen glance of a hawk or a falcon on all ordinary occasions, though sometimes we must admit the fates are against him ; and in such case not even mimetic colouring will save bird or beast.

Many charming birds visit this seafarer's home. Flocks of gulls sail in, circling and wheeling in mazy figures, now over sea, now over shore, now floating lightly on the waters, now settling like flakes of sea-foam on the low-lying rocks of low tide ; stormy petrels come in from their life on the ocean wave to hide their nests deep down in the shingle ; guillemots fly heavily down the cliff to dive for small fish that glitter as they rise again with their prey. Maybe the oystercatchers and ringed plovers from some neighbouring beach of sand, or a mud-flat not far away, come when the tide is low ; and land birds from above—wheatears, and stonechats, and sometimes a rare Dartford warbler—visit the rock-pipit by the sea. Peep, peep ! cheep, cheep ! Always the same answer he gives to the various cries that greet him ; and I think it means, " Here I am, and here I mean to stay," for even to us—and we frighten him a little as we wander through his home—he says this. Peep, peep ! cheep, cheep ! sounds from crag and boulder a little ahead, as he flits before us in short, wavering flights, and gives us plainly to understand who is lord of the manor in this Seafarer's Home.



## AMONGST THE MISSING.

A GLARE of light ; a brilliance of handsome ball-dresses and varied uniforms ; the warm scent of exotics and the seductive sound of dance music. It was the Duchess of Richmond's famous ball on the eve of Quatre Bras. Thought of coming battle disturbed the gaiety of the scene not a whit. Women sought to forget anxiety for husband or lover in the excitement of the dance ; soldiers, the responsibilities of war ; and diplomatists, the gravity of the approaching crisis.

"By Jove!" said a heavily-moustached cavalry captain, standing gazing critically at the dancers, with a group of brother officers. "Who's that very pretty girl dancing with Carrington of the Scots Greys?"

"What, the fair girl in pale blue and white?" said a supercilious young aide-de-camp. "That's Alice Maitland, daughter of Sir Robert Maitland. Carrington's in luck ; he's been dancing with her nearly all the evening."

"Yes, they say he's hopelessly in love with her," said a cornet of Carrington's regiment ; "can think of nothing else."

"Poor fellow!" rejoined the supercilious one in a tone of fine contempt, pulling the somewhat scanty hair that adorned his upper lip. "And I suppose he'll commit the inexcusable fault of matrimony, and there'll be the end of him."

"Yes, if she'll have him ; they say Ashby's entered for the same stakes though, and running strong, but Carrington certainly has the start of him."

"Well, I'd lay my money on the Major, now," broke in a fourth speaker. "Ashby's a deuced bad rival to run against."

"Take care," said the cornet ; "they passed quite close to us then ; I shouldn't wonder if Carrington had the full benefit of that interesting remark of yours."

Soon the dance and the interval that succeeded it were alike over, and the subject of the above conversation made his way towards a little knot of officers of his own regiment who were talking in low tones just inside the porch that led into the street, evidently engrossed in discussing some unusually exciting intelligence that had just been imparted to them. Carrington was not long in learning its import. In fact, their colonel had just received the famous order which has rendered that gay evening so memorable. The enemy's advance-guard had been discovered within a short march of Brussels, and the Duke had at once issued instructions that the officers should slip away from the ball without attracting attention, and be ready to march in three hours, with the prospect of immediate action. How strange the irony of fate that necessitated such an order at such a moment !

Carrington received the intelligence without comment. For the moment the great news almost staggered him. He passed hurriedly through the porch and into the cool night air, and there, pacing nervously to and fro, tried to realise what it meant to him. Captain Arthur Carrington was no coward, and indeed had served with no little distinction in the later Peninsular campaigns, and to such good purpose that he had won his captaincy after an unusually short term of service. No, a year ago it would have been glorious news to him, but now his enthusiasm was tempered with a strange sense of regret. Since then he had fallen in love—desperately in love—with that lovely girl with whom he had just been dancing, and during the last few days, despite the momentous events looming in the immediate future, and threatening at any moment to engulf him, he had been lost as in a pleasant dream, peopled only by himself and the fair Alice Maitland.

Now he must needs wake up to the hard realities of a soldier's career. Before another night had fallen he might have lost Alice for ever, with the life she had made all too sweet for him. As he paced up and down, thoughts crowded hurriedly through his brain. Then came an intense longing to tell her his love and learn his fate from her lips. If only he knew that she loved him, then it seemed he could go out readily enough to to-morrow's battle—the to-morrow that had almost begun—and meet death, if it came to him, with the courage worthy of an English gentleman.

Yes, if only he knew! For somehow the thought that he might never know was torture to his mind. And yet was it not the merest selfishness on his part to ask a girl to pledge her life to him and confess her love, when that love might after all mean little else but mourning and sorrow—the terrible sorrow of one who knows but a few short hours' betrothal, and then sees the happiness of all the future shattered in an instant? Yes, it was selfishness, he told himself again and again. And yet, a moment afterwards, he found himself pleading that, if she really loved him, her grief would be none the less poignant because she had no right to mourn for him as a lover, and must stifle the cruel pain and keep it hidden in her heart.

So the pros and cons chased each other through his excited mind, till he suddenly awoke to the fact that the music of a well-known quadrille had been sounding half unconsciously in his ears for he hardly knew how long.

He looked hastily at his programme. His partner was Alice Maitland, and the dance half over! He hurried back into the ball-room, and finding her deep in conversation with Major Ashby, he claimed his right with an awkward apology for not having presented himself sooner, and led her away on his arm.

As it was too late to join in the quadrille, they directed their steps to a quiet balcony, that proved unoccupied now that the dance was in progress.

Now it so happened that Alice was not a little piqued at this unwonted want of attention on the part of her cavalier, who up to the present time had paid her nothing but the most absolute devotion ; nor was her somewhat natural irritation decreased by the evident confusion and awkwardness of his manner. Arthur, on the other hand, was quite oblivious of his offence, and as he showed no inclination for further apology, nor indeed for further conversation of any kind, it devolved upon his partner to break the silence.

"Well," said Alice, half playfully and half in earnest, as she settled herself comfortably—and, to Arthur's partial eye, most bewitchingly—in the cushions of a sofa, "well, Sir Truant, have you nothing more to say for yourself in explanation of your gross neglect?"

But Sir Truant's mind was so occupied with a graver question that he had little explanation to offer.

"I am afraid not," he answered rather lamely ; "I was in the porch, trying to get cool."

"Then you must certainly have heard the music quite plainly, and you might have kept your engagement promptly enough—if you had cared to, of course."

The words were spoken with a coldness that showed Miss Maitland was getting really offended ; but strange to say, Arthur neither noticed the tone in which they were spoken, nor realised their meaning, so absorbed was he in the question that was to him so momentous : "Is it fair to her—is it fair?"

The words kept singing in his ears, his pulse beat fast with suppressed excitement, yet he could not solve the terrible doubt that had arisen in his mind. Half unconsciously he answered in a slow deliberate voice, "Yes, of course."

Then the sudden glance that shot from those deep blue eyes—and it robbed them of none of their beauty—and the unwonted severity of the lovely face before him almost roused him from his lethargy. He made a desperate effort to make conversation, and talked hurriedly and nervously, hardly aware of the chilling answers she made to his continued platitudes. In truth, Alice did not stop to analyse her own feelings, nor even to consider what could have made her cavalier so unlike himself this evening. That he should have left her, whom all the young officers raved about, and who might have had a dozen partners by the lifting of her little finger—that he should have left her sitting out, and steadily refusing all applicants until the dance was nearly over, had wounded her vanity and hurt her feelings very considerably. She had expected, at any rate, the most abject penitence to follow, or at least some explanation of his neglect, and was prepared eventually to extend her royal forgiveness to the culprit and reinstate him in her favour.

But this calm indifference with which he regarded his offence, this apparent assumption that he could treat her as he liked, stung her sensitive nature to the quick, and made her for the moment only too

anxious to impress upon him that he had mistaken the position in which he stood to her.

The dance was by this time over, and though the balcony where they were sitting was in a retired corner, there were seats near by and occupied now by the couples who had left the ball-room. To Arthur Carrington their presence afforded an indefinite sensation of relief, and for the moment he felt he was reprieved.

The longing to speak his heart and learn her answer had at last got the better of his scruples ; yet he felt almost glad now that he must put off the decisive moment a little longer. And all the time he chattered on thoughtlessly, never heeding that every careless sentence made him appear to her in a less favourable light. Then a waltz tune struck up in the ball-room below ; the seats near them were left vacant, and Alice made a movement as though she would fain be following the others downstairs, but her partner refused to notice it. The time had come at last and he was determined to speak, yet hardly knew how to begin.

"Will you kindly take me downstairs, Captain Carrington?"

The words drove him to speech at last.

"Miss Maitland, you *must* stay one moment"—the words sounded to Alice very like a command—"I have something I want particularly to say to you to-night."

"Then, Captain Carrington, I think you might have said it before ; now I am afraid it must keep till to-morrow," she answered coldly.

"But, Miss Maitland——"

"Will you kindly take me downstairs, Captain Carrington?" she interrupted before he could speak another word. "I am engaged for this dance to Major Ashby, and I would not miss it for the world."

This time the intention of her tone could not escape him. It seemed to burst upon him in a flash that Major Ashby had been very attentive to Miss Maitland lately, and now he remembered hearing that evening some words he had hardly understood at the time. In his excited state he caught up the idea only too readily. She had been leading him on, perhaps, only for her amusement, and all the time Ashby—the very suspicion made the blood leap fiercely to his cheek, and the idea carried conviction all the more speedily that, in the pleasant dream of the past few days, such a notion had never once occurred to him. Oh, how blind he had been ! and angry words rushed to his lips that in a calmer mood he would never have uttered.

"Major Ashby's dancing is doubtless infinitely preferable to my conversation, but——"

"Perhaps, even than the entertaining conversation with which you have just been honouring me," she retorted quickly ; "but that is hardly the point, I think."

"Only spare me one moment, Miss Maitland ; only hear me ; and then dance with him the rest of the evening, if you will," he continued bitterly.

They were both standing now: Alice, pale with anger; Arthur Carrington, with a wild look in his eye, and speaking in a voice trembling with a desperate eagerness. "But you don't understand; it may be the last chance; hear what I have to say now, or you may never have the opportunity again."

The words conveyed to her only one meaning, and roused all the pride in her not too humble nature.

"In that case, Captain Carrington, let it be never." She spoke the words clearly and decisively, and, drawn proudly up to her full height, cast upon him one glance of scorn and defiance that spoke to him only more eloquently than her words. Yet he would leave himself no possible ground for doubt; he seized her hand, almost crushing it in his fierce eagerness.

"Miss Maitland, do you quite understand me? For the last time—do you mean that?"

"Certainly," she answered in a tone of icy indifference; and at that moment they became aware that Major Ashby had advanced close upon them.

"This is my dance with you, I think, Miss Maitland," he remarked suavely.

"It is, Major—I hope you haven't been waiting for me long." Then turning a last glance on Arthur, and with a scornful "Thank you, Captain Carrington," she swept away on the Major's arm.

For a moment or two Arthur stood as one stunned, with a dazed look in his eyes; then he turned on his heel and moved slowly downstairs. As he passed the door of the ball-room, he glanced in, and at that moment Major Ashby and his partner passed close by him in the graceful movement of the dance. The Major's head was bent over hers, his cheek almost touching her hair, and the words that he spoke in a low tone in her ear must have been of pleasant import, to judge by the charming smile that they evoked.

Arthur Carrington turned away, his face very pale, with a hard, drawn look about the mouth, and went out into the night to seek his quarters and prepare for the work that was now so close before him.

Meanwhile the gallant Major was rapidly improving his position with Miss Maitland. She was certainly very pleasantly disposed to him this evening, and received his little advances with a readiness which, to tell the truth, the Major had never noticed in her before. For Major Ashby, although he enjoyed, and was not a little proud of, the reputation of being a master in the noble art of lady-killing, did not let his conceit ruin his judgment, and could usually guess very shrewdly his true position in a lady's affection. I do not wish to insinuate that the Major was a systematic heart-breaker; but though his affection for the sex collectively was unlimited, his particular affection for any one member of it had hitherto proved strictly limited in point of duration. In other words, like many another, he was devoted to flirtation, and, what is more, was really skilled



in that intricate science. The latest object of his affections was, needless to say, Miss Maitland, whom, though he had an acquaintance of some standing with her father, he had never met until a week ago. Since then he had prosecuted his suit with more earnestness than usual, spurred on [not a little by the evident rivalry of Arthur Carrington. This evening a considerable weight had been lifted from his mind by the little scene above related, of which he had quite unintentionally witnessed the close. He had seen sufficient to make him tolerably certain, by putting two and two together, that Arthur Carrington had proposed and been definitely refused. Hence he was not altogether unprepared to find himself in sole possession of the field.

Yes, there was no doubt about it, Miss Maitland was bent on making herself extremely agreeable. The Major felt that he was making more advance in that short half hour than he had during the full week he had known her; nor had the charm of her manner ever struck him so forcibly before. At length, all too soon, the music stopped, and he and his partner retired to the same balcony where he had found her before the dance. They stood in the cool night air, looking out across the dusky landscape that lay dimly revealed by the bright starlight.

"Major Ashby," she asked suddenly, "why is it you men are all leaving so early to-night? I saw a dozen officers or more preparing to go as we were on our way upstairs."

"Do you know, Miss Maitland, that is a secret I'm afraid I hardly ought to tell—even to you," he answered quietly, his voice lingering softly on those last words.

"A secret?" she queried. "Oh, then you must tell me! I shall never forgive you if you rouse my curiosity in that way, and refuse to satisfy it."

"Well, I am afraid I can refuse you nothing," he said, with a smile, after a moment's pause. In truth, he was wondering what impression the news might make upon her. "The fact is, we have orders to leave the ball quietly and be ready to march in two hours. The enemy's advance-guard is reported to have crossed the Sambre, and we shall be in action before the day is half over."

If he had hoped for some sign of distress on her part, he was amply repaid. As she realised the full meaning of those cruelly straightforward words, all the colour fled from her cheeks. He thought she would have fainted, and put his arm round her to support her to a chair.

"I am so sorry for startling you like this," he said penitently; "but I never thought you would have any—any particular interest in the news."

"Oh no," she said, with an attempt to smile, "only it was so sudden; it quite took my breath away!"

For a moment neither of them spoke.

"Alice—Miss Maitland," at last he continued in an earnest voice—so earnest that it almost surprised him—"Miss Maitland, you don't know what a terrible thing it is for a man to go into battle when his heart is sunk in despair; when he has no hope of the one thing that could make life worth living.<sup>1</sup> If only I thought—if only you—if you only——" he stammered, and almost for the first time in his life felt completely at a loss.

Her face was very pale, and her eyes, unnaturally bright they seemed, were looking into his with an expression he could not fathom. She seemed hardly to understand him, and yet to follow every syllable with an almost painful interest; but she answered not a word.

Then another couple came and sat close behind them, and he had no further chance, or perhaps desire, to express his meaning more clearly. He felt he had gone rather further than he had intended; and yet he only half regretted it.

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Two hours later the regiment was quietly falling-in in the open street along which most of them were quartered. Not many minutes later all was in readiness, and they were moving quietly out of the town on the road to "honour and glory," a road along which many a man of them, his heart now beating high with hope, would never return.

As they left the outskirts of Brussels the Major found himself riding close to Arthur Carrington, and attempted, with singularly little success, to draw him into conversation.

"Well, my boy," he said at last, "I can't say you're in an entertaining mood to-night, and you look as solemn and glum as a Sphinx—I give you up;" and the Major, who was in surprisingly good spirits, relapsed into unwilling silence.

"Ashby," suddenly said Arthur, speaking in low earnest tones, "will you answer me one question? It may sound an impertinence, but if you knew what it means to me, and perhaps you can guess, I think you would not refuse me."

"Dear me, we are very mysterious to-night! What may it be?" quoth the Major, evidently in an excellent humour with himself and the rest of the world.

"Do you—care for Alice Maitland?"

"Why, of course," returned Ashby, with a smile; "don't we all love her madly?"

"Yes, but have you more serious intentions?"

The Major for a moment seemed in doubt as to whether he should answer the question; then he replied quietly: "Perhaps I have."

Carrington looked searchingly into his face: "You really mean that?"

"Certainly." And the answer seemed to satisfy his questioner, for he remained silent.

Presently he spoke again, in a low voice and rather huskily, so that the Major could scarcely catch the words:

"I suppose *she* cares for *you*?"

"I haven't asked her."

"But you can make a pretty shrewd guess."

"Well, she was terribly cut up when she heard I was going straight into action to-day, if that means anything;" and the Major spoke in the complacent tone of one who thought it meant a great deal. Then, as if ashamed of having revealed so much, he continued sharply: "But that's enough, my friend. This is hardly a subject for discussion."

"Quite true," said Arthur drily. "Yes," he muttered to himself, "the rich man and the ewe lamb; it's an old story now, but none the less sad for all that. Thank God," and the grim thought brought a bitter smile to his lips—"Thank God, there'll be big fighting these next few days, and a man doesn't often come through big fighting if he doesn't care to."

Yet, alas for the inconsistency of woman, or perchance the stupidity of man—at this very moment, not half a mile away, Alice Maitland was sobbing herself to sleep, and the name the poor girl murmured so fondly to herself was not a name to which Major Ashby could lay any claim.

No need to dwell upon the agony of those terrible days of suspense, only to be followed by a yet more terrible certainty, when, after news of the glorious battle of Waterloo, came the list of killed and missing, which embittered the sweetness of victory and shattered the happiness of so many English homes.

Included in that fatal list was the name of Arthur Carrington, Captain, Scots Greys, and what that simple line of print meant to the girl, who, loving him so truly and fondly, had yet sent him away in hopeless despair, with words she would now have given all the world to unsay, we may also leave untold; nor pry into the heart that must needs hide its cruel pain behind the mask of cold indifference.

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The flag was flying over Maitland Court, which proclaimed to the surrounding country that the Maitland family was at home. Usually they had a large house party in the summer, but Sir John had had a bad attack of the gout, and so there were few visitors. Amongst these was Major Ashby, now seriously in love with Alice Maitland. Judging from his success on the night of the ball, when, as he thought, she had been within an ace of accepting him, he had anticipated a welcome reception to further advances, but to his surprise and disappointment he found her cold and reserved when he reminded her of their conversation on the balcony. She was so listless and unlike her usual self that he could not but notice the change. To be precipitate and receive a refusal would have been fatal. The cautious Major wished to make sure of his ground, and by dint of skilful remarks and close observation, he succeeded in guessing the real truth of the matter;

and indeed, when he so far forgot himself as to tax her with a love for Carrington, she made no attempt to deny it. The knowledge that Carrington, and Carrington alone, had had any chance of winning her hand was something of a shock to his vanity; but he pretended to a vast deal of sympathy for her unhappy attachment, and, in consequence, Alice Maitland and he were before long on very intimate terms; and the Major reflected that he was making excellent progress and had but to bide his time.

This being the state of affairs, it was not with feelings of unmixed pleasure that one morning at breakfast he received a letter from a brother officer and read the following passage:—

“And now of all people in the world—or, to write more correctly, of all people believed to be out of the world—whom do you suppose I saw yesterday? None other than Arthur Carrington. You may imagine how astounded I was when the poor fellow report had killed and buried some months ago greeted me with a hearty shake of the hand, which testified conclusively to my doubting senses that he was no ghost but veritable flesh and blood. He seems to have had a very narrow escape, and looks a bit thin and pale, with a slight gash over his eye from a French sabre; he fell when first we charged, lay for dead in the enemy’s lines, and had a horrible night of it. Strange to say, he never lost consciousness, though he was ridden over by the Prussian cavalry and very roughly treated by would-be looters. At last, by means of promising a heavy reward, he prevailed on a peasant who searched him for coin, and was grievously disappointed at finding his amiable designs had already been forestalled, to carry him to his cottage, where he lay at death’s door for six or seven weeks; but the peasant and his wife, apparently a very decent couple when their avarice could side with their humanity, managed to pull him through with the help of a local apothecary, and Carrington left for Brussels with the blessings of the worthy couple. Then he made his way to England and London, reported himself at headquarters and came across me at the club.”

Major Ashby read this wholly unexpected news, and instinctively glanced at Miss Maitland.

“Why, my dear Ashby,” said old Sir Robert, “you look terribly grave—no bad news, I hope, eh?”

“Oh no, thank you, Sir Robert—quite the contrary. Yet,” thought he to himself, “it might turn out very bad news for me,” and again he looked at Miss Maitland.

Breakfast over, Major Ashby lit a cigar and strolled by himself on the terrace.

“This dead man turning up like a bad penny is exceedingly awkward,” he thought, “and may play the deuce with my prospects of marrying Alice Maitland. There is no doubt that she was very fond of him; she’s been dreadfully cut up about his death, and just as I was making way in her good graces, it’s uncommonly hard that those

wretched peasants should have saved him and let him come back to England to spoil sport." And the Major puffed vigorously at his cigar and walked up and down the terrace as he meditated on the best course to pursue in view of the return of his rival.

Alice did not yet know but that her lover was really killed (and under six feet of earth in the plain of Waterloo), but that she would long remain in ignorance of the real state of affairs was most unlikely. At all events, he would not be the bearer of the news; of that he was determined. All's fair in love and war, and as the cigar burnt lower he came to the conclusion that the only plan for him was to waste no time, but propose for her hand that very day and trust to a successful issue.

Evidently fortune favoured him, for just as he had made up his mind to risk all on an immediate proposal at the very first opportunity, the fair cause of his heart-burnings stepped out of the French window on to the terrace, basket in hand, armed with thick gloves and a pair of scissors, as pretty a flower-seeker as one could well wish to see. Here was his opportunity all unsought.

"Fully equipped for an expedition among the flowers, I see," said the Major, flinging away the stump of his cigar.

"Yes," she said, "among the wild flowers this morning."

"And may I be my lady's escort?" said he.

"You may," she laughed; "and, like a faithful knight, you shall carry the basket."

There had been a heavy fall of dew in the night and every blade of grass glistened in the sunshine. A mist overhung the horizon and gave promise of a hot day, and the lazy drone of the bees, the languid caw of the rooks, and the distant voices of reapers in a neighbouring field came softly through the air. As the Major walked across the lawn toward the meadow beyond, and talked to the pretty girl at his side, he felt as if Nature smiled upon his love, and the sweet hope of possession came over him, while the serpent which lurked in his paradise, in the shape of the unwelcome letter, was carefully hidden away in the breast-pocket of his coat.

Now it happened on this same lovely morning that Arthur Carrington was travelling from London to his home in Gloucestershire, not far from Maitland Court. The beauty of the scenery had no pleasing influence upon him, for, as he drove along the well-known road, he thought of his blighted love, and a hundred times he cursed the Frenchman who had done his work so ill, and left him life to remember the bitterness of his disappointed passion. Then he would upbraid himself for his ingratitude to the Providence which had preserved him, and vow to think no more of the girl who had rejected him, but face his future like a man, exchange into an Indian regiment, and never see Alice Maitland again.

But when the post-chaise drew up at the Maitland Arms, and the postillion got down to water the horses and refresh himself with a

copious draught of ale, Carrington felt a great desire to go and see the house where he had first met his fate, and the garden where he had walked with her in the old days, seemingly so long ago, before he went abroad, and before that unlucky night at the Brussels ball. Perhaps, unseen himself, he might even catch a glimpse of his beloved—see her for the last time. Prudence told him it was a fool's errand, but Prudence spoke unheeded.

Leaving word that he would return in half-an-hour, he took a path which led through meadow-land and corn-field in the direction of Maitland Court. Just as he was nearing the highway which divided the fields from the park, his heart beat quickly, for he heard well-known voices, and had just time to stand in the shelter of the hedge, when Alice Maitland and Major Ashby, in earnest conversation, came down the road and leant against the dividing style. They were so intent in conversation that they did not notice him, where he stood, not daring to move. To see her thus, with his successful rival, was galling indeed; Carrington set his teeth, and hoped they would pass on down the road. He scarcely heard what they were saying, so dazed was he with the unwelcome sight, but he heard her speak his name, and held his breath, and could but listen.

"Yes," said the Major, speaking very earnestly, "you loved him; but that is past; and now that he is dead, it is all different. Surely you will not sacrifice the living for the dead?"

"Do you think," she said, speaking very slowly, and with evident effort, "that—that there is no chance that he is—is not dead? He was only reported amongst—the missing."

It seemed so hard to speak out her impossible, but fondly-cherished hope, only to be shattered by the sceptical common-sense of another. For a moment the Major hesitated. It was one thing to conceal the news of a rival's safety, another to deliberately state that he believed him to be dead. She looked up at him with such an eager look in her eyes, that the Major, feeling how little she cared for him in comparison with her love for Carrington, fiercely resolved she should be his at all cost, and flung all scruple to the wind.

"It is useless to deceive you with false hopes," he said. "There can be no possible doubt but that Arthur Carrington was killed—if not we should have had news of him by now."

Carrington could contain himself no longer; every pulse in his body seemed to be throbbing with the exquisite thought that she loved him.

"Not so dead as you think, Ashby," he exclaimed, stepping into the open from out the shadow of the hedge.

Alice gave a little cry—all joy, all wonderment; and would have fallen, but that Arthur caught her in his arms.

"I am delighted to have been mistaken," retorted Ashby bravely; but, needless to say, the gallant Major did not look it.



## THE PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT.

BY CHARLES W. Wood, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND,"  
"LETTERS FROM MAJORCA," ETC., ETC.



INSENSIBLY as the needle points to the Pole, so the gaze of all who visit Cairo is directed towards the Pyramids.

It is possible to see them in the distance from the heights of the Citadel, forming part of that wonderful view already described. Beyond the windings of the sacred Nile rise the well-known outlines, centre of interest in this matchless panorama. If you wander away into the outskirts of the desert, still afar off you may see those tombs rising in solitary grandeur. Only when you have scoured many miles of this waste land, and placed many brown and

yellow sandhills and undulations between you and the Pyramids, do they finally disappear from view.

And then you have turned your back upon the world, and stand face to face with Nature; and night and day succeed each other, and suns rise and set, and nothing meets the eye but a wide wilderness; unbounded plains of white glistening sand on which the sun pours his hot relentless rays, or the moon sheds down her soft and silvery light.

Here indeed is the majesty of an almost eternal silence: a solitude to all intents and purposes never broken; the rest David longed for when he wished for the wings of a dove—but of which he would soon have grown weary. Only a despondent mood could long bear with the sameness and desolation of the desert, and David's was no morbid mind. He felt keenly for the moment, and his self-reproaches were profound and bitter whilst they lasted; but once over, his thoughts recovered their tone and his songs were no longer set in a minor key.

So one day we also turned our faces towards the Pyramids, and our backs upon Cairo.

Passing out by the road leading to Old Cairo, we soon branched off from it over the great iron bridge which spans the Nile, to the credit of the French who built it. To the right lay the magnificent park and palace of Gezêreh, but we had nothing to do with that to-day, for our road lay sharply to the left.

So to the left we turned. Osman was not our companion. Important and unexpected official news had caused him to remain with the Khedive, and very reluctantly we had to bid each other a temporary farewell.

"I hoped we should have seen the Pyramids together," he remarked; "but so long as I take part in the diplomatic world, I am not master of my own time. On such occasions I almost regret not having withdrawn from it all ere now; but one likes to live with some object in view, and do some little good in one's day and generation. After all, you will not find in these mighty Pyramids the subtle charm and beauty that delight one in the Tombs of the Caliphs and the Mosques of Cairo. They will awe you by their size, their simple majesty of outline; but the refinement of minute detail is absent from them. Ascend them by all means, but do not attempt the interior. It is an ordeal, with very little to repay you."

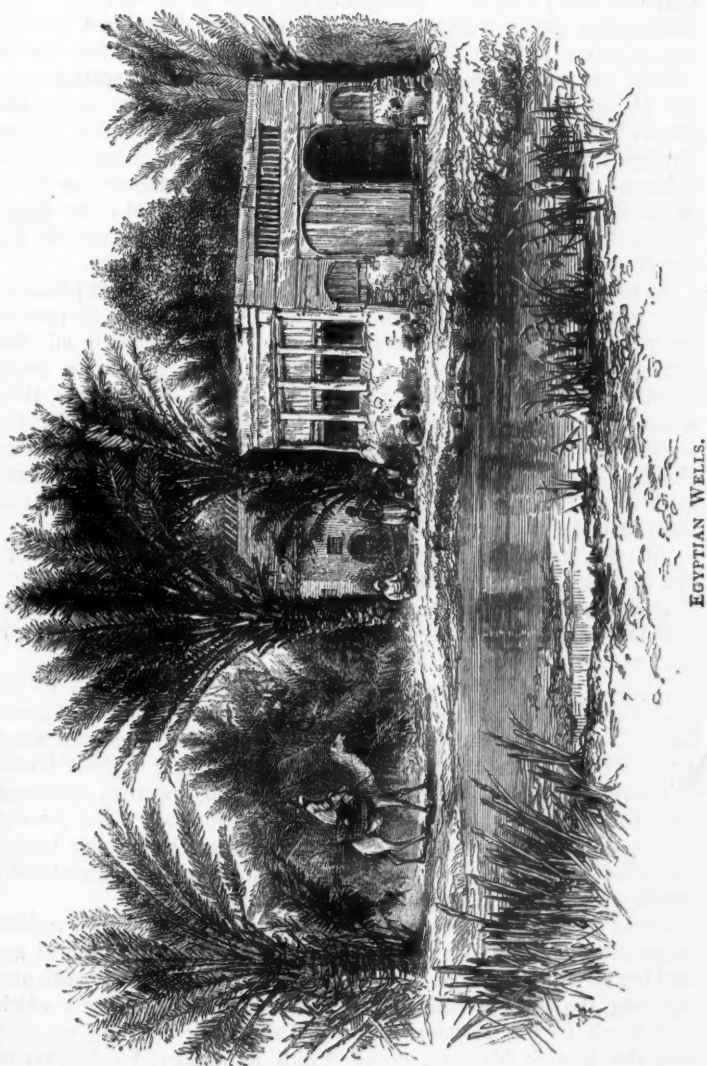
So we departed, yet not alone. General A.—our fellow-traveller from Marseilles, with whom we had formed a pleasant acquaintance—joined us. To him also it was all old and familiar ground, and our visits together to the Boulak Museum had been especially interesting. He revelled in its antiquities as much as we delighted in the Tombs and Mosques of Cairo: and had them all by heart.

The drive occupies about an hour and a half, and the new road stretching from Cairo to the very foot of the Pyramids, makes it an easy journey.

It has, however, taken away much of the romance of the situation. By this new road the Pyramids seem almost in touch with the capital, linked with civilisation. The possibility of adventure, the charm of the picturesque, have almost disappeared. Side by side with the venerable waters of the Nile this macadamised road runs straight as engineering skill could make it. Beautiful trees overshadow it, but they are not the picturesque date-palm or the noble sycamore: for the sycamore of Egypt rivals the stately oak of England.

In past times a journey to the Pyramids from Cairo was a very different matter from a visit of to-day. The present road is built upon a broad embankment, high and dry above all inundations. At the time of the rising of the waters, these escape and spread into the surrounding country through two bridges, and the traveller passing over them, may keep on his way dryshod. Not so in days gone by. Then, at the overflowing, the canals intersecting the wide plains were lost in broad sheets of water, laden with fertilising influence but unpleasant to encounter. It was a journey accomplished

more often with the help of donkeys or camels than in any other way. The road was necessarily circuitous and eccentric ; possessing some-



thing of the charm of an old-fashioned house, where unexpected passages and staircases meet you at every turn.

The whole panorama, to right and left, was essentially Egyptian. Behind you lay the old capital, with its citadel, as yet uncrowned by the Mosque of Hassan. Beyond rose the Mokattam Hills, just as they rise to-day: for the "strength of the hills" is unchanging. The surrounding plains were covered with forests of date-palms, bearing rich clusters of fruit in their season. The ground, also in its season, was green with waving blades of corn. Villages sprang up in the plains, and mosques and tombs were conspicuous, whilst the tamarisk and acacia led up to them in shady groves. The distant Pyramids were always visible, not only those of Gizeh, but those of Sakkarah, Aboosir and others. Some of us are accustomed to think of the Pyramids of Gizeh as the only Pyramids of Egypt; but Egypt is a land of pyramids, and there are many of them. Beyond all lay the desert with its grey sandhills and barren rocks.

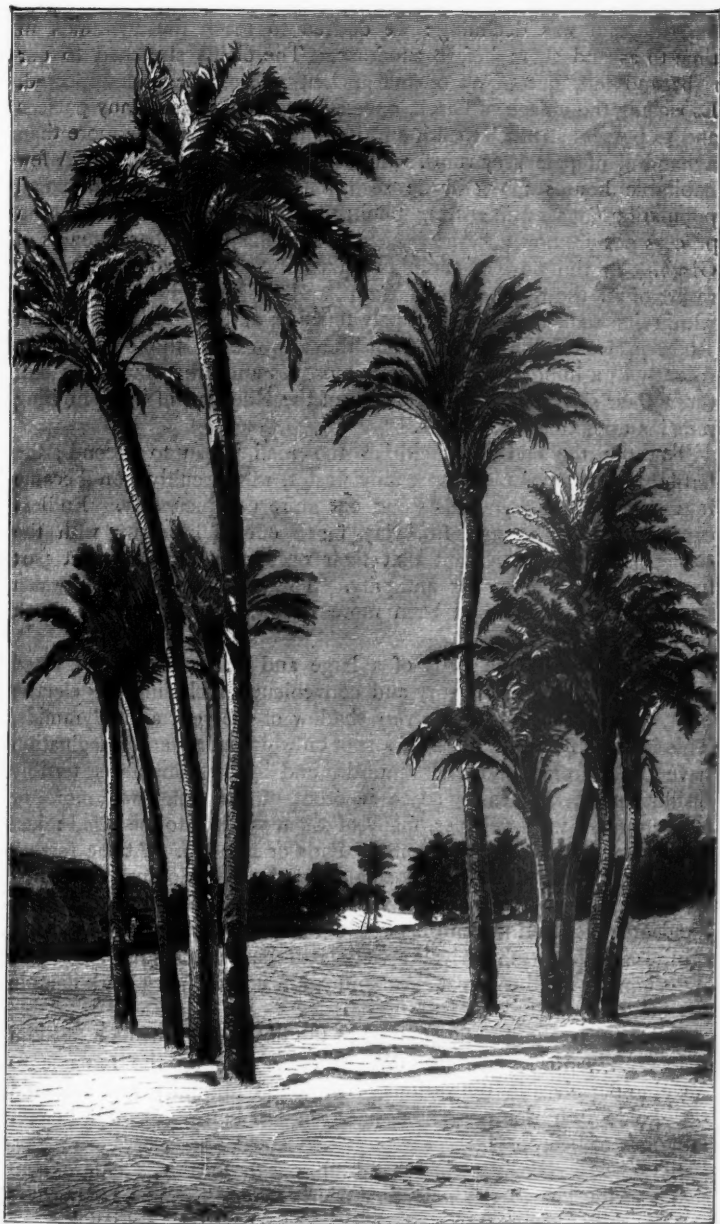
In those days herds of camels and buffaloes might be seen plodding their patient way between Cairo and the Pyramids, and so passing away into the desert: features which added so much to all this picturesque Oriental charm. Large flocks of birds, after a rapid flight, would alight on the watery plains, and contemplate their white reflections with serene pleasure. All was intensified by the wonderful rarefied air, and above all reposed the clear blue skies of this land of corn and wine, of milk and honey. Air and sky have no little to do with its charm; they appeal to the imagination and intoxicate the senses: but it is a power in which no evil dwells.

All this has been changed, and people now comfortably bowl to the Pyramids over a smooth road in modern landaus and barouches. The donkeys are still there for those who prefer them; but the buffaloes have become almost a tradition, and the camels are only used as beasts of burden.

The scene, nevertheless, still has much beauty. Behind us yet rises Cairo, with its mosque-crowned citadel backed by the Mokattam hills. Near us flow the waters of the Nile, enlivened here and there by a dahabeeyeh or a barge with sails full set if the slightest breeze is blowing. At best their progress is slow and lingering, and those who travel by them need patience and self-control. The journey up the Nile often seems interminable, and many a traveller having chartered his dahabeeyeh for the second cataract, contents himself with reaching the first, and imagining the remainder.

Boats are moored to the banks, and natives are busy at their various occupations. Some are carrying bundles of sugar-cane, others are looking on in idleness, or perhaps are squatting upon the banks and breaking the cane by bending it round their heads, a process which says much for the hardness of their skulls. On our right we soon pass the Boulak Museum, crowded with its wonderful collection of antiquities.

To-day we did not stay to renew our wonder and admiration. There had been a little delay in starting and time pressed. It was afternoon



PALM TREES.

and the sun was declining: we desired to reach the Pyramids in time to ascend them before sundown. The plains stretched to our right and left, but many of the ancient villages have disappeared. Especially the village of Gizeh, once said to contain so many palaces and to possess so much wealth and importance, is now little more than a handful of pale grey ruins, with no sign of greatness left. A few habitable houses may still be seen, a few neglected cafés, a small population engaged in rearing poultry by means of artificial heat—a process not unknown to the ancients: and this is all that remains of Gizeh. In the days of the Mamelukes it was a favourite summer resort of all the rich people of Cairo, and wealth and luxury reigned within its walls. It was strongly fortified, and with the Island of Roda protected the capital from the advance of the enemy. As recently as a hundred years ago its mosques and other buildings still threw their shadows upon the waters of the Nile, but of these nothing remains excepting a few ruins.

Towards the end of the drive the road began to ascend; the fertile plains gave place to sandy wastes, where cultivation became impossible. The Pyramids stood out more conspicuously. Endless carriages passed to and fro, very much out of harmony with the scene, whilst it was evident that their occupants for the most part had as little reverence for antiquity. The end of our journey was a shock for which we had been more or less prepared, but a shock nevertheless.

We drew up at the steps of a large and fashionable hotel, fitted up with every modern luxury and convenience, including the electric light, all reposing under the very shadow of the venerable Pyramids. This is one's first impression of a spot on which mind and imagination have dwelt from childhood upwards, and at first one feels terribly disillusioned. The sandy space in front of the hotel was more or less crowded with vehicles, many of them waiting to be hired: just as they might wait in the streets of Paris or London. At the further end, towards the Pyramids, a small crowd of Bedouins, controlled by a Sheykh or Patriarch—a venerable-looking being with a dark, handsome face and a white beard—were restlessly moving to and fro, on the alert for fresh arrivals: victims to be pushed and hoisted to the summit of the Great Pyramid with undue haste and ignoble ceremony.

As our driver gracefully stopped at the hotel, down came a fashionable *Portier* to receive us. We at once gave up the struggle to imagine ourselves in the regions of profound antiquity, and followed our guide into richly-carpeted halls, endless corridors and a perfect labyrinth of bedrooms.

There was very little time to dwell on these things before consigning ourselves to the tender mercies of the Bedouins, told off by the Sheykh as our escort.

On first approaching the Pyramids a sense of disappointment is



inevitable. For years imagination has magnified them into monuments almost piercing the skies. One expects to be more overwhelmed than when gazing upon the highest mountains of Switzerland or a towering chain of the Himalayas. At the first moment we wonder why so much should have been made of these structures, which scarcely excite our surprise. But it is a feeling that very soon begins to wear away, and presently disappears. The more we see of the Pyramids, the more we marvel, the greater their influence upon us. Standing at their base and looking upwards, we become more and more impressed and lost in astonishment. Only very gradually does their size make itself truly felt and realized: and never, perhaps, from the very nature of their construction, is it quite understood.

To-day all we could see and gather was a wonderful structure, of which the enormous stones were piled one upon the other; and which—we felt with a sort of despair—had to be climbed. Three Bedouins were assigned to us, three to H. General A., to whom the ascent was nothing new, decided to enjoy the sunset from *terra firma*.

It can scarcely be said that we climbed up the Great Pyramid. The advance guard of two men dragged us up by the arms, which once or twice just escaped dislocation. The office of the third Bedouin was to act as a sort of propeller, and assist the advance guard by vigorously pushing up from behind. At this undignified proceeding, however, we drew the line, and dispensed with his services; a concession for which he showed far less gratitude than it deserved. The stones were enormous, and often beyond anything less than the stride of a giant. Fortunately the advance guard kept a good hold upon us, and the arms refused to leave their sockets; otherwise, instead of seeing the sun set from the top of the Great Pyramid, we should have been comfortably reposing in unconscious fragments at the bottom.

A breathless ascent of fourteen minutes, and we reached the top, feeling that our last moments were approaching. But we had exaggerated the evil, judging of the probable result by our sensations. A minute's rest restored us to a normal condition, and we were able to look around.

We stood on a platform of about twelve square yards. After the rapid ascent, the small footholds of stone after stone, it seemed a huge space, on which one felt a sense of freedom and security. Quite a small crowd could have been accommodated here without danger. Happily we had it to ourselves, and the magnificent view and sunset were disturbed only by some half-dozen Bedouins who seem to haunt the platform, and pressed us to buy worthless "antiquities." We had to yield for the sake of peace and quietness and the sunset.

Originally this platform was far smaller, and the pyramid has been lowered by thirty feet. This was done centuries ago, when the stones were removed to help in the building of Cairo. It is almost as puzzling to conceive how they were brought down, as how, in

remote ages, they were taken up. The secret will never be known ; but we do know that the ancients possessed powers and possibilities and secrets, of which we cannot even dream : a tenacity of purpose, a greatness of conception and idea, a physical energy, altogether out of proportion with man's seventy years : which pass "as a dream that is told."

We turned to the view. Nothing could exaggerate its charm and magnificence, its apparently boundless extent. There are two distinct views and impressions to be gained from the top of the Great Pyramid, according to the season of the year : what time the waters are out upon the earth, and the vast surrounding plains look as though another deluge were coming upon them ; and again when the waters have long disappeared, and a green and fertile country on the one hand, stands out in strange contrast with the sandy wastes of the desert on the other.

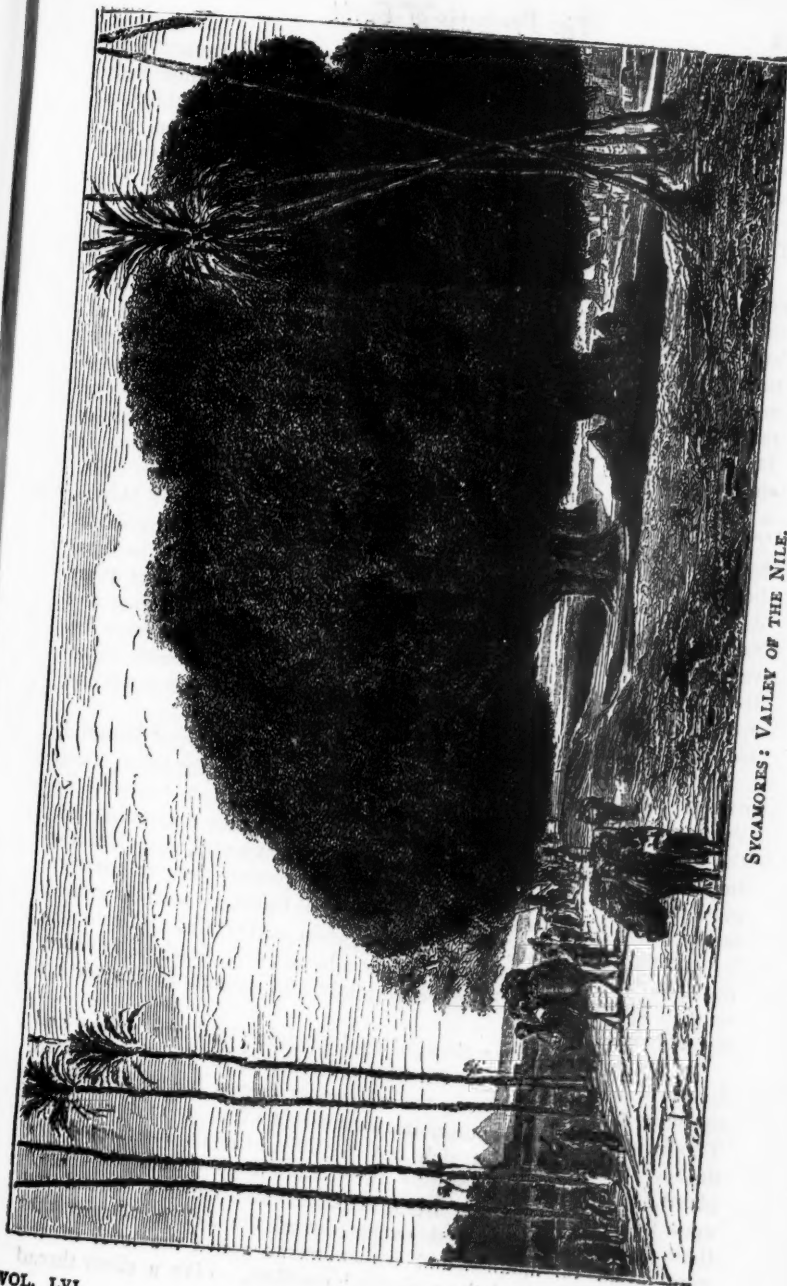
So was it to-day.

It was not the time of the inundations, and we could trace far and near the winding waters of the Nile, which ran a serpent-like course between rich plains, studded here and there with small villages ; those of Gizeh, Fostat, and Boulak especially visible. From this point, all the picturesque craft moving upon the water, or moored to the banks, looked like small dream vessels. The sun was nearing the horizon ; all the glare of day had disappeared ; the sky was putting on a deeper tone ; the air was almost intoxicating. Afar off the domes and minarets of Cairo, the citadel crowned by the Mosque of Hassan, were distinctly outlined against the clear sky. The rarefied atmosphere seemed to diminish half the distance. Everything—domes, minarets, citadel—was touched and gilded by the setting sun ; or rather was flushed to a rosy red. The Mokattam hills behind the citadel were also steeped in this glorious light, which, as the sun descended, turned to a rich, delicious purple, the true Eastern bloom. Amongst these Mokattam hills are the quarries of Masarah, which, thousands of years ago, furnished many of the stones with which the pyramids were built. Cairo also, in this fading light, looked like a dream city.

The contrast in the scene spread at our feet was wonderful and marked. On the one hand cultivated plains, full of repose, in time ripening to harvest : emblem of life. On the other hand the sandy desert, stretching away into infinitude, white and warm under the setting sun, but desolate and barren, incapable of yielding the fruits of the earth : emblem of death. Each divided by a clear and distinct boundary.

Close to us was the second great Pyramid, and far below, looking out upon the boundless wastes of sand, a scene eternal in its unchanging aspect, was the Sphinx.

It was too far down to be seen in detail, but it was impossible, even from here, to look upon it for the first time without a thrill of



SYCAMORES: VALLEY OF THE NILE.

emotion. In a moment we seemed to pass out of the present into touch with the ancients and the far-off past. Here for thousands of years this mysterious image, of whose origin and age nothing is known, has kept a steady outlook upon the distant horizon, the everlasting skies, in eternal silence and solitude. Abdellatif might well observe in the centuries gone by: "Everything fears Time, but Time fears the Pyramids."

Other pyramids were visible from our position. Near the two great Pyramids of Gizeh, yet separated by a certain distance, are several smaller ones. All these stand upon a plateau of rock about a hundred feet above the level of the plain. Nothing in the shape of monument could be more in harmony with the vast desert. Simple and severe in outline, matching in colour the desert sand, large enough to look gigantic even in this boundless area, a sense of fitness at once takes possession of the mind. They also possess a majesty and repose which equally adapt themselves to the wilderness: a wilderness indeed, in the days when the Pyramids were built. Towns and villages gradually arose: Gizeh, in the time of the Mamelooks, became lively and frequented; but the immediate neighbourhood of the Pyramids was left to silence and solitude. Only in these days, when nothing is sacred, have the spirit and atmosphere of these ancient tombs been desecrated, and music and dancing, feasting and revelry are found under their very shadow. One day, it may be, the Sphinx will awaken from its long slumber endued with supernatural power, and in righteous anger will cause all the disturbing element to vanish into thin air.

To the south, as we looked from the platform of the Great Pyramid, rose the Pyramids of Aboostr, Dashoor and Sakharah; the latter, a step Pyramid, with its wonderful interior corridors and Apis tombs. To the north were the Pyramids of Abû Roâsh, with hilly undulating outlines in the background. Beyond all, as we have said, stretched the great desert, in the heart of which Bedouins encamp; where caravan-series wend their weary way across the trackless wastes, guided by compasses by day, by the stars when night falls. There the deceitful mirage has awakened many a hope in the parched traveller, only to quench it again more certainly and hasten in despair his untimely end.

To the east, the scene changed as by magic. All the yellow and brown of death and the desert, turned to the green of vitality, lighted up by precious water that in the wilderness means life to the dying. The river wound its course, its waters this evening, in the sunset, flushed to a warm tint, rich but fleeting. Canals intersected the plains, their courses traced by the beautiful palm-trees that grew upon their banks. Other trees, in groves and clusters, spread out their fan-like branches and overshadowed the Fellah villages that were raised on mounds and embankments above the level of the plain, out of reach of the periodical overflow. Like a silver thread



BEDOUIN ENCAMPMENT.



ran the high road to Cairo, not aggressive here, but reminding one of civilisation and the world and disillusion : a hundred thoughts one would like to banish.

The sun sank, a round red ball, clear to the very end. It touched the horizon, then gradually disappeared. Almost immediately the sky in the east and north became flushed with a deep orange glow, more gorgeous than anything ever seen out of these latitudes. The whole sky seemed to catch the reflection and throw it back to earth, where with the light of day it soon departed. The Mokattam hills took on their lovely purple, and their outlines grew faint and misty. We felt that the short twilight must be given up to descending : bad as the ascent had been, the return journey would be still more unpleasant. Yet it cannot be said that either experience was really objectionable. Danger has been suggested, but of danger there can be little or none. To some the commencement of the going down may be a little appalling. There are no ropes or handrails to guide your steps, such as, we believe, have now been put up the side of the North Cape : a descent infinitely more trying than the descent of the Great Pyramid.

Down we went, jumping from one step to another, closely accompanied by the guides, who would not leave us for an instant. Twilight faded, the surrounding country grew more and more indistinct. One object after another went out, as if Nature had taken up her roll call and dismissed them ; the shadows on the plains cast by the waving palm-trees disappeared ; Cairo itself passed into a recollection ; the silver thread of the Nile grew dark ; and with some relief we found ourselves once more on a level with the world.

Here the Sheykh with his venerable beard and imposing turban came up, hoped we had not been disappointed in our expedition, and that the guides had done their duty. He urged us to make acquaintance with the interior on the morrow ; but remembering Osman's warning, we left the morrow to decide the question.

Darkness had nearly fallen ; all the surrounding country was shut out ; the Bedouins of the Pyramids—they have lost all the nobility and fine character of the true Bedouin of the desert—were leaving to gather in rest fresh strength for other victims on the morrow ; the Pyramids began to loom out in gigantic outlines against the darkening sky ; lights gleamed from every window in the hotel ; laughter and talking streamed from the great central hall ; all the solemn silence and repose of the summit of the Pyramid had departed. There we had passed out of touch with earth ; had almost hovered on the very borders of the unseen ; nothing but Nature surrounded us, very much of it untouched by Time and the hand of man. Down on this lower level we came back to the ordinary concerns of every-day life.

The hall was furnished in true Oriental fashion. Rugs were thrown



upon the marble floor; mushrabeeyeh screens were cunningly disposed in corners and recesses; Oriental *portières*, magnificent and weighty, hung in front of many of the doors; Moorish lamps shed around a subdued and very picturesque light. Small groups were standing in all directions, laughing, talking, excited; in remote and conveniently shaded corners, sundry couples had disposed themselves on soft couches and were devoting the golden moments to the bad habit of flirting. This is as certain to be met with everywhere as sundry well-known advertisements, and if a bird of the air could carry the tale, which would be found the more commonplace? At best it is reversing the order of things. Marriage should contain the true romance, the lofty ideal; instead of which, marriage too often brings the awakening.

Amidst all this luxury and light, all this noise and laughter, all these fashionable costumes of people waiting for the gong to announce dinner, it was difficult, nay, impossible, to picture oneself as dwelling under the very shadow of the eternal Pyramids. If the kings of old could have imagined their tombs so desecrated, the silence and repose of death so broken, would they not have carried their work to the very centre of the great desert? Perhaps it is well that they do not rest in their tomb-chambers, or ghosts might haunt the precincts of the Pyramids to the terror of frail and frivolous humanity.

In the drawing-room were many luxurious couches, the floor was thickly carpeted, all the ordinary English papers lay about the tables; and here, too, Moorish and other lamps were cunningly disposed to great purpose.

But the most startling effect was reserved for the dining-room. A gong sounded, the doors were thrown open, and a stream of light came forth.

We went down a few steps, and found ourselves in an immense chamber, very lofty, very brilliant with electric light. The walls were painted in Egyptian decorations; large Moorish arches here and there broke the monotony of the outlines; the tables, perfectly appointed, glittering with glass and plate, looked everything that was refined and civilised. Never, in any hotel in any country, had we seen a dining-room so effectively arranged; and seldom, taking it all round, any hotel so perfectly organised. We ceased to wonder that there are those who spend a whole winter at the Mena House, for in addition to this wealth of luxury they breathe the dry air of the desert, which is so much purer than that of Cairo.

Night had long fallen when we once more turned our backs upon all this light and luxury, and passed out into what, by comparison, was an Egyptian darkness.

And yet it was very far from being a dark night. The moon, no longer quite at the full, but still far from her third quarter, was shedding down upon the earth the intensely soft and silvery light she bears in the East. We went forth under the guidance of General A.,

to whom it was all familiar ground and sacred. Like ourselves he deplored the incongruous element of the hotel, but also made the best of it. There were compensations ; and to the greater part of the assemblage, attractions ; for not six people out of all that number went out to gaze upon the Pyramids by moonlight. We profited by their indifference, for we had the scene to ourselves, and were able to dismiss all recollections and effects of crowds and electric lighting, luxuriously-appointed dining-rooms, and subdued and sentimental corners.

We left the hotel and shook off its dust from our feet, which, however, was soon replaced by the sand of the desert. The latter might be very poetical, but was not comfortable. Under the General's escort we were able to dispense with those formidable-looking Bedouins who wander about the sandhills at night in search of work, clad in dark cloaks and closely-fitting turbans, their noiseless footsteps giving them a sense of mystery which strikes upon you with disagreeable sensations. They are gifted with the eyes of hawks, for they see you in the darkness from a considerable distance. Suddenly, on the brow of a sandhill, you perceive one of these mysterious objects spring up and stand out in the moonlight. In a moment he has espied you in the sheltered hollow, and is leaping down to offer his services, his long cloak flying, his staff flourishing. If you did not know him for a wandering Arab, too often harmless but vagabond, you might invest him with the dignity of a simple shepherd watching his flocks by night, after the manner of the shepherds in the early ages of the world.

We passed round to the other side of the Pyramids, where by day or night, happily, all signs of hotel or any other life have disappeared. Here indeed we may gaze upon these wonderful structures and imagine ourselves out of reach of civilisation. Here the Sphinx looks out upon the desert and the far-off horizon, and nothing need trouble its repose but the cry of the night owl or the howling of the distant jackal.

It was an intensely bright and beautiful night. The warmth of the day had given place to a cool delicious freshness, and the stars shone with unrivalled brilliancy ; it was the very place and hour for romance. Higher rose the lovely moon.

We stood facing the Sphinx. The sandhills gleamed pure and cold in the pale light. The shadows of the Pyramids were clearly defined, as were their outlines against the night sky. As the moments fled and the hours passed, their true influence fell upon us. No one has really felt and appreciated the great Pyramids until he has seen them by moonlight. Emblem of death, tombs for the dead, night and darkness are essentially their element. Then, indeed, they looked almost superhuman, full of unspeakable solemnity and repose, of majesty and grandeur. Their very simplicity of outline adds to their influence. The eye, arrested by no particular detail, takes in the general effect of the whole stupendous structures. It seemed



ABYSSINIAN SLAVE—FOR CAIRO.

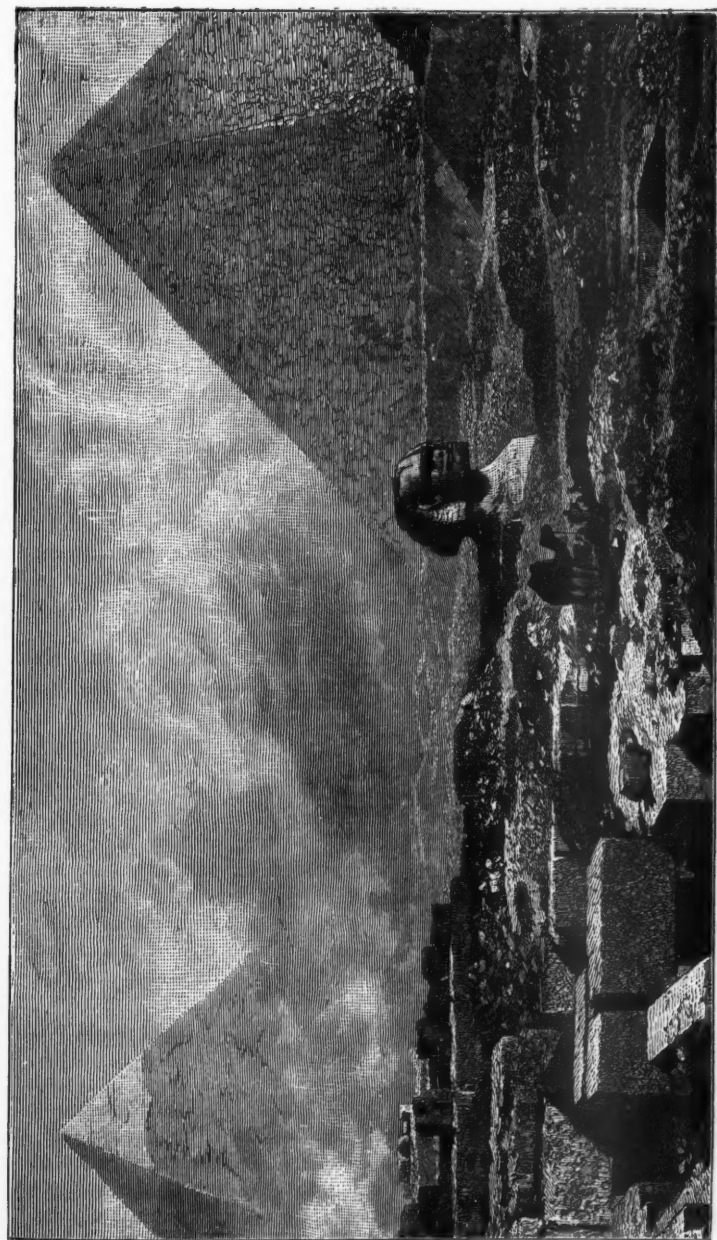
impossible to intrude upon their eternal silence. Almost they seemed to commune with the stars. Here Moses might have stood when he received the Commandments and veiled his face from the children of

Israel. They were only less worthy of the honour than Mount Pisgah, the work not of man, but of God.

Less striking, more mysterious, was the Sphinx. This at all times is best seen by moonlight, which softens down the destructive work of time, and throws the mutilated features into shadow. It is difficult to realise its enormous size. Behind it are the immense Pyramids; below it is no object of comparison, whilst sandhills more or less surround it. To-night its solemn attitude of repose, its sense of mystery, were perfect. It seemed immovable as the earth, fathomless as the skies; a safe guardian of the great Pyramids; an oracle waiting the course of the ages for utterance: biding its time. The destiny of the world might have hung upon its lips. One could only think with strange awe and admiration of the minds and the hands which had accomplished these wonders in the far-gone ages, with a largeness of soul, a breadth of conception difficult to realise in these days and never to be approached. The world has grown older; wiser perhaps; but its wisdom has been the result of chance and experience and slow development. The greatness of the ancients was spontaneous. Life seemed long, Time endless, nothing daunted them.

Yet the Sphinx was not placed there to guard the Pyramids, for it is supposed to be of still greater antiquity. The Greek Mythology makes the Sphinx feminine, but the ancients who carved it adorned with helmet and beard, signs of royalty, intended it to be masculine. It is singular how veiled is its origin and its past, many of the ancient travellers who describe the Pyramids not even alluding to it. For ages all but its head and body was buried in sand, but this has been cleared away. Its huge and stately paws fifty feet long, full of repose and power, are now visible, with their Greek inscriptions. The body measures 140 feet, and is formed of the natural rock turned into shape by clumsy-masonry. The head measures 30 feet from the forehead to the chin, and is 14 feet wide. Pliny in his descriptions mentions its red colour, some portions of which still remain. That its destiny must have served some religious purpose, seems proved by the Temple immediately beneath it. The stone pavement between its paws led towards the Pyramids. Beneath its heart stood a sacrificial altar, and the smoke of the fire ascended into its nostrils. How solemn, those rites in the wilderness, powerfully affecting the minds of the worshippers in the days of its glory.

The outlines of the face have disappeared, and it is impossible to say to what race they belonged. By the Arabs it is called "The Father of Terror," but its attitude, full of calmness and repose, rather suggests benevolence. Some Arabian writers declare it to be a talisman for keeping away the sand from the fields and pastures beyond, and it was supposed to lose its power, when, according to tradition, a fanatic in the 14th century partially destroyed the face. What now remains is as hideous as a face without a nose can be: but suggests that, like many of the Chinese idols, its countenance was smiling and serene,



PYRAMIDS AND SPHINX.



We have said that its destiny was probably religious, for it seems to guard the granite Temple of the Sphinx, as it is called, which Mariette, devoted Egyptologist of ceaseless energy, discovered in 1853.

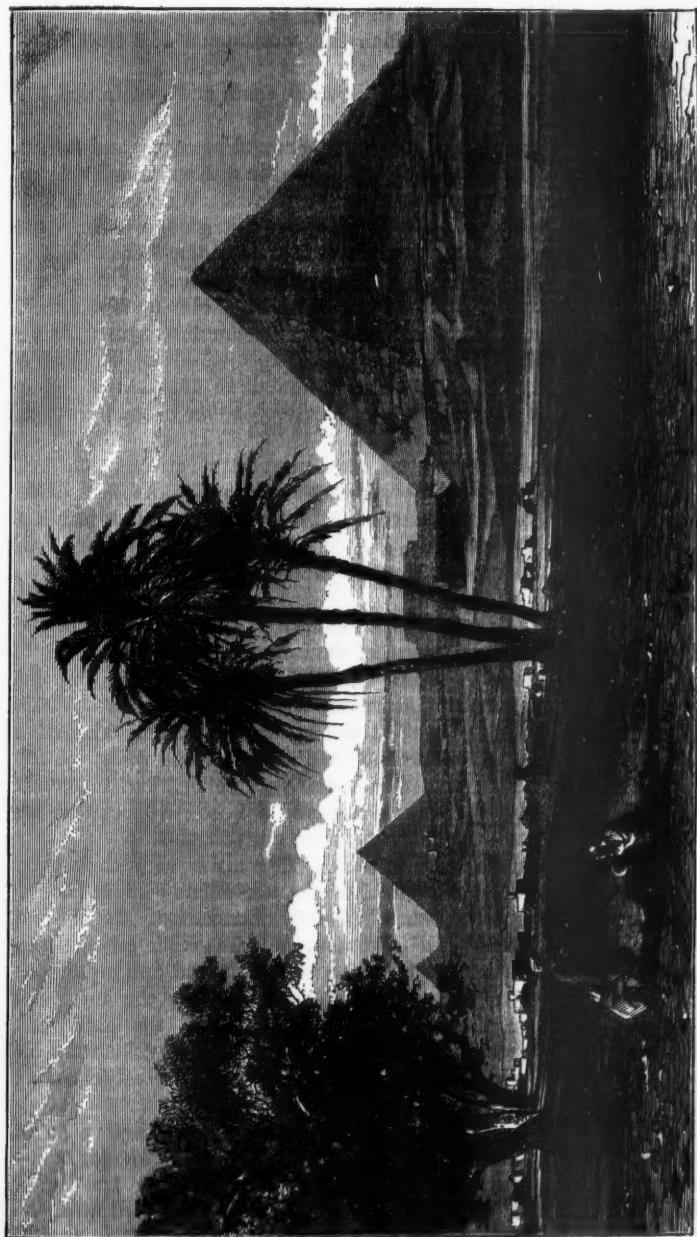
The Temple lies a little to the south-east of the Sphinx, which overlooks the granite flights leading into the interior. Looking backward, the huge head is ever visible, as if guarding the sacred precincts from the approach of Evil. Here the statue of Khafra, now in the Boulak Museum, was found at the bottom of a well; suggesting that the temple might have been constructed in his reign. If so, it is the only known temple handed down to us from the days of the primeval monarchy.

Nothing can be more simple than the construction, nothing more stupendous than the labour it must have cost. It is entirely built of huge blocks of red granite from Assooan, varied here and there by equally large blocks of alabaster. At the end of the staircase is a long narrow passage, ending in a large open chamber. This is divided into three aisles by square columns: immense blocks of marble reposing one upon another: an arrangement which has been compared to Stonehenge. But Stonehenge is more rugged and barbarous. The Temple of the Sphinx, more perfect in design, suggests a very different people from the mystic Druids. The well in which the statue of Khafra was found is in the second and smaller transept, and is now filled up.

Leading from the greater hall is a mortuary chamber with six niches for mummies: tombs supposed to have been constructed by Khafra for his own family. All, however, is lost in obscurity. Not an inscription has been discovered, not the smallest detail of decoration, to guide the explorer in giving its origin a date. This very fact—the silence and nakedness of its stones—suggests an age anterior to all Egyptian art and influence. They, full of signs and symbolic writing, would surely have left some record of their work behind them. These Egyptians, who worked for posterity, were not likely to leave such a labour without its “sign-manual.” All other monuments belonging to ancient Egypt, down to its most remote period, bear their inscriptions; the Temple of the Sphinx is as silent and mysterious as the Sphinx itself, which guards its secret only too well. The oracle is dumb, and will be dumb for ever.

The construction of the Temple points to a period when the science of architecture had scarcely dawned upon the world. Rude and rough as the Temple of Stonehenge, but with more plan and system, its huge blocks of hard, imperishable granite marvellously and beautifully cut. Whatever its age and origin, it was undoubtedly the work of a mighty and powerful people. Some have thought that this was the Temple of Osiris, situated to the south of the Sphinx: others that it was the Temple of the Sphinx itself: for the Sphinx had no secondary cause for existence: it was not in itself a tomb or





SECOND AND THIRD PYRAMID.

a temple or a shrine : but was supposed to represent a solar deity : was one of the forms under which they worshipped Har-em-Khu—"Horus in the dazzling sun."

All this marvellous temple lies below the sand, and was buried for ages in silence and obscurity.

To-night as we went down the dark stairs and passages, and turned into the central hall, the moonlight streamed in with weird and solemn effect, with deep mysterious lights and shadows. We were in a new world. Much of it was buried in profoundest gloom. The dark starlit sky formed our canopy. The passages leading from one aisle to another were impenetrably dark. Where the moonlight fell we traced the enormous blocks of stone, reposing one upon another. Their mere weight had kept them in place for countless ages. As we gazed upon the tomb-recesses, we almost expected mummies to arise and bid us depart from precincts hallowed to themselves. Our voices alone broke the silence, our footsteps alone echoed through these wonderful aisles.

Even as we looked we were suddenly and desperately startled. One of the mummies—which ought to be here and are not—seemed to have come to life in very deed. A faintest footstep was heard, a voice whispered through the silence with awful effect. A form loomed out, mysterious, clad in sable garments, apparently of gigantic height.

For an instant one's heart stood still, from the very effects of the surroundings, the unexpectedness of the intrusion.

It was only a wandering Arab who had scented his prey, and did not even ask permission to guide our steps. With gestures which were evidently meant to be abject apologies, he suddenly kindled a torch and lighted up the interior. He was wise, and whilst we felt impelled to follow him, he used his torch with effect, and expressed himself by dumb motions, but said never a word : a discretion for which we excused him this intrusion upon our thoughts.

To these he gave a fresh current. The aisles with their huge granite blocks one upon another, their gigantic pillars without base or capital or any adornment, were brilliantly illuminated. Lights and shadows fell and flitted in all directions, and altogether extinguished the softer, more mysterious light of the moon. Weird and mysterious was our guide, his dark flashing eyes lighted up by the torch, the closely-fitting turban standing out in contrast with the dark cloak which these Arabs wear so gracefully. Silent as his voice were his footsteps : noiselessly as a ghost he glided about ; the least obtrusive guide we had ever met.

Then, when his work was done, without unnecessary pause or repetition, he extinguished his torch, and with a deep Oriental salutation, waited our liberality. Who could have withheld his hand ? His very tact and sagacity merited reward. This bestowed, he put the finishing touch to his perfect behaviour by a second

obeisance, and an instant departure, leaving us once more to the solitude of the temple with its moon-cast lights and shadows.

We also soon bade farewell to the solemn precincts, and went up once more to the regions of the Sphinx and the Pyramids. The moon was higher than when we had gone down, the shadows had shortened. There in the solemn night stood the wonderful creations. The Sphinx looked down upon us, nor seemed to rebuke us for intruding upon the precincts of its sacred temple. Wonderful the outlines of the Pyramids beyond, looking in very truth as if Time might fear them. All about us were sandy hills and undulations.

We climbed to the top of one of these hills. Crossing the plain, a black, solitary, receding image, was our late guide, passing on with slow and dignified strides, his long cloak gathered about him, his staff keeping time to his step. In the distance we heard the howling of a jackal : sharp, angry, eager : as if seeking its prey and baffled therein. Far off to the right, visible in the moonlight, we saw a string of camels plodding their way towards Cairo. These probably had come through the desert from some far-off town—Jeddah, it might be, where our mother Eve is said to be buried—and were now in touch with their well-earned rest : patient, plodding beasts of burden, obedient to the will of man and asking only a little kindness in return. Who would not deal tenderly with the dumb animals of creation ?

In all the wide plain we saw no other signs of life. It was a hushed and sleeping world : as far as we were concerned, it might almost have been a desert, dead world. The river ran its silent course : the wonderful Nile, with its atmosphere of romance, almost of holiness. The flushed waters of sunset were now turned into pale silver by the moon, where its rays fell athwart them. As we looked at the Pyramids, a longing took possession of us to climb once more to the top and look out upon the world in all its solemn silence and darkness. We were, however, sufficiently sane to restrain our ardour and not attempt the impossible.

But all travellers, in all times, have fallen under the charm and influence of the Pyramids. Their fascination is in proportion to their size and grandeur. For ages their destiny was a contested point. The opinions even of great men were divided : some thought one thing, some another. Only recently has the matter been finally set at rest. These great Pyramids of Egypt, like all the lesser Pyramids, were intended for tombs. This in no way prevented their being constructed on geometrical principles, but rather added to their interest and perfection. Thought had been brought to bear upon them. Such labours could not be lightly undertaken, and are perfect in every detail.

The building of pyramids in Egypt stretches over a period of some 700 years. It commenced, in round numbers, 3000 years before the Christian era, and ended about the year 2300. When the Pharaohs removed their capital from Memphis to Thebes, their ideas changed :

in place of mausoleums above ground, they preferred tombs cut out of the solid rock of the earth.

Nearly all the Pyramids are found between the Delta and the Fayoum. Many are small, many in ruins. Only a few, such as the great Pyramids of Gizeh, seem built to defy time itself. Even the step Pyramid of Sakharah, with its immense tomb-corridors and chambers, its gigantic Apis sarcophagi, seems wearing away under the influence of the ever-rolling stream. The construction of each Pyramid commenced from the centre or interior, and was gradually carried upwards and outwards. Every monarch on ascending the throne immediately began building his tomb, and was anxious to finish it as soon as possible, lest death should overtake him. Once completed it could be enlarged and built up more and more, according to the length of the reign. This is a reason given for the varying sizes of the monuments.

The Pyramids of Gizeh take us back to the 4th Dynasty, or Primæval Monarchy: and Khufu, or Cheops, is supposed to have built the Great Pyramid. Herodotus is the first ancient historian whose record has been handed down. Everything he saw he described vividly, but his historical facts were not always correct. It was probably as difficult to arrive at the truth of things in his day as in ours. To Cheops he ascribes every wickedness, a character apparently not deserved. He is said to have oppressed the Egyptians, and certainly made them work. The construction of the causeway for conveying the stones alone took ten years.

The great Pyramid itself is said to have taken 100,000 men twenty years to build. Tradition has it that it cost £200,000, or 1600 talents, to supply the men with raphanus roots, onions and garlic alone: one of the least considerable of the items. According to Pliny, not 100,000 but 360,000 men were employed twenty years in building the Pyramid: and it really seems as if oppression or slavery alone could have produced such gigantic results.

The present height of the great Pyramid is 451 feet: it was originally 481 feet, higher than the highest building in existence, for even the spire of Strasburg Cathedral is only 461 feet. The length of each side is 775 feet: the area of the base was 63,444 square yards: its solid contents about 85,000,000 cubic feet.

As soon as a king died his mausoleum was hastily finished with an outer covering of hard and polished granite: the steps used in construction were thus filled in and the opening leading to the tomb-chamber disappeared for ever from view. Only one or two chambers of the kings of short reign were decorated, and these not elaborately: those of longer reign carefully painted their passages and chambers, covering them profusely with historical and symbolic legends.

Few subjects have received greater thought, investigation and speculation than these Pyramids of Egypt. Probably all that ever can be said or known about them has been stated; no new discovery



CROSSING THE DESERT.

can well give rise to a new theory ; the suggestion that they were tombs and tombs only, is sensible and probable, altogether in accordance with the traditions of ancient Egypt, and the character and superstitions handed down to us of the Primæval monarchs of the Memphite dynasties : the earliest known records, excepting the Thinite, which commences with Mena, the first Egyptian king and founder of Ancient Memphis.

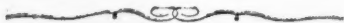
But when all is said and done, the great Pyramids of Gizeh will remain enveloped in a certain amount of mystery.

To them belongs the homage and veneration due to antiquity, to labours and results unparalleled in the world's history, to monuments that as the Arabian physician of Bagdad so aptly remarked, time itself may fear. Even here, as we see, the despoiling hand of man has not been found wanting ; the great Pyramid is shorn of its crown ; and it is well for the world that only 30 feet have been taken from its height. The pathway to the top is worn by pilgrims—just as the iron toe of St. Peter's statue at Rome is fast disappearing under the kisses of the faithful ; otherwise time has spared the wonderful monument ; not wearing the stones, but covering them with a tone and atmosphere, beautiful and refined.

To-night, as we gazed, this exquisite old-world tone was invisible. The still ascending moon threw down her soft and silvery light, and touched the Pyramids with her own peculiar magic. It was not at all the magic we had enjoyed with Osman when looking down upon the moonlit Tombs of the Caliphs ; matchless monuments, that, compared with the Pyramids, are but of yesterday.

Here the effect was very different. From our sandhill, with sand-hills and plains stretching away into spaces "measureless to man," within a stone's-throw of the sleeping waters of the Nile, we seemed, whilst gazing upon the oldest, most gigantic monument of the world, to have left that world far behind us. The death-like silence around seemed as if it could never be broken ; not more dumb and portentous the Sphinx at our feet ; not more solemn the Pyramids beyond ; not more eternal the far-off sky with its travelling constellations.

And looking upwards those same stars appeared to be shedding down a silent benediction upon this little spot of antiquity, where, combined with the vastness of Divine creation, everything that was great and noble in the work and mind of man had been brought to a magnificent and imperishable conclusion.





## THE STREGA'S CURSE.

BY LADY MARGARET MAJENDIE.

## CHAPTER XI.

IT was midnight when at last Colomba awoke thoroughly from the strange exhausted condition in which she had lain so long. She opened her eyes, and sat up on the rude bed on which she had been placed.

With the true instinct of the sick nurse, old Lalla was on her feet and by the side of her patient at her first movement.

There was neither curtain nor blind to the small window which was exactly over Colomba's bed, and the moonlight streamed in, a broad sheet of greenish light, showing every wrinkle and line in the old woman's withered face. Colomba rubbed her eyes, at first she fancied that it was still one of the dream-faces, a creation of her own overwrought nerves, that was still with her; but Lalla's voice, which was kindly in tone, although rather muffled and thick from want of teeth, brought her back to reality.

"You are better, my beauty? See! old Lalla has not lost her skill. It was a bad wound—a very ugly wound."

"And all the more ugly that it was the work of my own father," said Cola.

"Poor child! poor child! but all the same, a father has a right to chastise his child. Do you behave ill to him? Come! I am safe as your father confessor. Tell old Lalla all about it."

Colomba lay back on her pillow, old Lalla sat beside her, her weird face close to her, and the moonlight shone over both.

A great wish for confession, for an outpouring of all the burning, passionate feelings that were swelling her heart, came surging up in the girl's breast. At home they were sick of her sorrows; from the Priore she received now less sympathy, more exhortation. Perhaps this old woman might be different. The savage instinct of want of civilisation was strong in her, to blazon out her sorrows and her wrongs, to make the whole world respond to her lamentations.

"Lalla! Lalla!" she cried, "where is my husband? He has forsaken me! Can you not help me? Comfort me!"

"It depends on the sort of comfort you want, my beauty, whether I can help you or not. Do you owe him a bitter grudge, this faithless lover who has deserted you?"

"I am not sure," cried the girl. "I do not know what I want, or what would ease my pain. I will tell you all about it. I was happy,

Lalla—happy as the kid on the mountain-side, as the wild birds skimming through the air; happy because the future of my life had in it something that might come, some great possibilities, some hope more real and full of what I craved than the joys of paradise. Nino once promised me a new world, a world where to live was life."

"Nino!" cried the old woman with all the peasant's savage contempt of deformity. "You could think of Nino! a splendid girl like you, my beauty, think of wedding a *stroppato*."

"I did not know what a man could be like," cried Colomba, "till that day when I was coming down from the hills, riding our tallest mule Biondino. I found them by the roadside. Gian (may Heaven's curse rest on him!) helpless, unable to walk or stand—Livio, my Livio, kneeling by him with the face of a San Michele, the strength of Christofer, the gentleness of the holy Nathanael! And between us we carried the comrade to the inn. Day after day he used to follow me, he would stand by me in the cemetery where I always sat under the great black cross, or follow me up the road to the spots where the goats love best to browse, till his eyes told me at last that he loved me, and my heart went out to his, and I swore to be his bride. Alas! alas! where is he now?"

"Then," said the old woman slowly, "he mocked you with a half-finished ceremony and drove off with his friend. Child, child! do you believe in him still? Then why is he not here?"

"Why? I have thought, I have wondered, I have prayed. Day after day I stand watching the road with the wild hunger in my heart for him to come. I tell myself to-day—yes, to-day, no, to-morrow he will come. When the night is dark and I hear the dull heavy breathing of all asleep in my home, I creep out and go down the road and stand at our old trysting-place, under the carouba tree, and I call him louder and louder till the hills seem to ring with the sound of his name."

"What is that for?" said the old woman, shuddering. "In the gay haunts of Florence and Turin he cannot hear you; if he is false he would not heed you."

"But," said Colomba, fearfully, "there, alone in the chill moonlight, when I call him, I feel as if one certainty at least would be mine. At that time my spirit so cries on him, so yearns for him, that if he were dead, if his soul were in the spirit world it would come to me. I should know it, I should feel it, and the certainty would be—not happiness— Ah, heaven! despair! yet peace, even as the despair that accepts, is peace compared to the despair that is born of suspense."

"He is not dead," said Lalla, thoughtfully.

As she spoke the moonlight flitted over her strange wrinkled face. The half-closed eyes, the working mouth, the strong grey hair which blew back from her thin bony brows gave her the ghastly look of the Strega.

Colomba trembled. "Not dead? You know it?" she faltered.

"I know it. I am certain of it."

"Then where is he? Why does he not come? He is mine. We have stood together before the priest. If he is alive he should be here. Where is he?"

"He is false!"

Colomba started up. She held the old woman with a grasp of steel, her burning eyes fixed on the withered ghastly face. There certainly must have been some breeze or wind stirring in the little room, for it seemed as if her long black hair blew backward also so that one might have fancied that it stood on end, and that the white set face, colourless as wax, with parted lips and brows bent into a line of intolerable anguish, was that of a spirit in torment.

"Tell me the truth," she exclaimed. "What do you know?"

"I see him," cried Lalla, raising her long skinny finger in the air. "It is moonlight there, it is shining on marble steps, the air is full of the perfume of flowers, and the sound of splash of fountains. The silence is only broken by the croak of the frog, and the shrill rattle of a thousand cicadas. In and out of the ilex trees I can see the fireflies dance—myriad brilliant sparks. I can see her. She is very beautiful! As she passes by, the black cypress shadows flit one by one over her milk-white gown till she stands in the broad light by the fountain, one hand holding back the white folds, the other held fast in his."

"What are you telling me? What do you see?" gasped Colomba.

Lalla's eyes were fixed on vacancy, a strange kind of phosphoric green light like that of a cat seemed to gleam in them.

"Hush, hush, child!" she said. "Do not disturb me. Am I not right? Did you not wish to consult the Strega?"

"It is true, then? You are a Strega?"

A new and awful terror seized upon Colomba. She held the very name of Strega in unconquerable fear; and now she found herself actually in the power and under the influence of one of these terrible beings whose powers she did not for a moment doubt. The old woman's strange fixed gaze held her under a spell.

"Will you hear the rest of my vision?" she said. "Believe me, my Cola, it is always wholesome in this world to know the truth."

"Go on! go on!"

"The lady I see is beautiful—not the black beauty of the night such as yours. She is fair, with eyes blue as the gentian flower, and hair like the golden wine of Asti. He bends down to speak to her. The moonlight shines into his eyes. I see in them the light of love, and know that to this woman he has surrendered his faith, his honour, and his heart."

Colomba fell back on the pillow, every trace of colour had left even her parched and burning lips.

"He is false!" hissed the old woman. "He is gone; not because

he is dead ; not because the will of heaven has stepped between you, but because to the heart's core he is false !”

Colomba was panting hard, the lips were drawn back from her teeth, her hands were convulsively twisted in her hair.

There was a pause ; then Lalla began again, speaking in a harsh whisper :

“When a great love is thus thrown back upon itself it changes into disdain.”

“Into hate, Lalla !—fierce hate !”

The words were so sudden, so fierce, that the old woman started. She smiled, a hideous smile contorting her face with a ghastly mirthless spasm.

“That is brave !” she said. “When one no longer lives to love, one may live to hate ! To natures such as yours and mine some master passion is necessary. Do I not read you aright, Cola ? How if this master-passion lead from love to hate, from hate to revenge ! Would it not content you ?”

“It would be—almost happiness.”

“Happiness is a tame word ! It would give you triumph ! joy ! It is the only thing left to you now—revenge !”

Colomba clasped her hands, her terror was rising again. “You—you are a Strega ?” she faltered.

“Yes.”

“And you can give me this revenge !”

“Yes ; but it is costly.”

The old woman now suddenly sat down and resumed her distaff, as if she had done with the subject.

Colomba raised herself again, looking at her fearfully, the words had sunk deep into her breast. “I must think,” she exclaimed, “I must think ! Your words must not drive me mad !”

Lalla rose up and began to arrange the disordered bed-clothes, Colomba controlling her impulse to shrink from her touch for fear of offending her.

“Think no more, child,” said Lalla. “Go to sleep, you will need all your strength to-morrow.”

Colomba echoed the words “to-morrow,” and turned her head away.

Lalla went to her own couch, muttering low to herself, and in five minutes was asleep. Not so Colomba. All through the rest of the night the girl lay brooding, her eyes wide open, shining with sombre gloom, her hands twisted together. When morning dawned and its cold wan light stole into the room there was a great change in the grandly beautiful face on which it fell. All womanly softness, all sorrow and sweetness, had passed away, leaving a strong pitiless hardness in their place, so stern, so merciless that the old woman who had wrought the change trembled before her own handiwork.

## CHAPTER XII.

As the morning broke, exhausted nature resumed her sway, and Colomba fell into a heavy sleep.

Very silently old Lalla crept out of the house, huddling on a cloak and tying a dark kerchief round her rough grey head. White silvery mists hung in the valleys. Every blade of grass, every leaf and flower was wet with dew, the white gleams of the young sun turned all into sparkling diamonds.

The door of Bondi's house stood open. Within, with slow step and heavy eyes, Maddalena was preparing food for the men; already Carlo's guttural tones were stirring up the weary mules, those patient beasts of burden who now never knew the luxury of sufficient rest.

Old Lalla knocked at the door. Maddalena looked up, and, conquering the aversion or dread she had always had of the old woman, invited her in.

"You are abroad early, good Lalla," she said; "I thought ours was the earliest household astir in Maiano, for none work so hard early and late as my father and the boys."

"I thought he would wish for news of Colomba," said Lalla, accepting the bowl of goat's milk and hunch of black bread which Maddalena held out to her.

"She is better?"

"She sleeps now, but she has lost much blood. Good morning, Bondi!" she exclaimed as the old man came heavily down the ladder, only answering her greeting with a sullen nod. "Do you not wish for news of your daughter?"

"Not I!" he answered savagely. "Much use you would be with your broken promises."

"My promises hold good," she said, nodding her head sagely. "I promised to cure Cola of her love and her sorrow, my promise is half fulfilled. I shall soon call upon you to fulfil yours. A gold piece, Bondi mine!—a gold piece!"

Maddalena whispered anxiously in her father's ear. "What does she mean, father? Have you dealings with her? She is not to be trusted, people whisper of her that she is a witch."

"Maddalena! Maddalena!"

Piero's voice was calling her from outside; he was harnessing the mules to their cart, and wanted her to come out and speak to him. The patient beasts stood first on one side, then on the other, vainly trying to rest their trembling limbs. The stone-waggons on the quarries are fearfully heavy, the burden on the animals great. Mercifully, it does not last long. They die very soon, worn out in their prime.

"Maddalena, what does the old witch say about Cola?"

"She is better, she still sleeps."

Piero had a softened look in his face, "I am sorry I brought so much of my father's anger on her," he said.

"You will not do it again?" said Maddalena; "I grant that it is hard to put up with her, but you will be patient, Piero."

He gave a quick impatient sigh. He was a man of few words; he finished fastening the scarlet tassel under the chin of the quiet Biondino, then with a guttural sound of encouragement put the cart into motion and went off. Nobody waited for any one, far down the hill Carlo's voice came back to them, singing snatches of a little minor song, each couplet ending on a long-drawn minor note.

Lalla had gone close to old Bondi and said low in his ear, "Already I have half earned the gold piece, your daughter's love turns to hate. All will be well."

He shrank a little away from her as he answered, "That is well, Lalla, you shall have your reward."

Carlo's voice in the far distance came back sweet and musical to their ears.

Then he passed away down the road, and old Bondi, shaking himself like some rough old dog, followed him down to his work. Lalla went back to her own house. She opened the door softly, and gave a smile of satisfaction as she perceived that her guest was still sleeping.

All through the day the girl slept on; she was exhausted by loss of blood, and her strong nature recruited itself by sleep. It was a very profound sleep. Now and then when some noise from without penetrated its depth, the shrill crow of a distant cock, the lilt of a song, or some movement of old Lalla's, Colomba's brow would contract as if with pain, and she would throw out her hands with a restless moan.

Lalla did not disturb her; she was busy in her own way; she was glad that those fierce dark eyes should be closed for a time.

### CHAPTER XIII.

UP the steep mountain pass one was coming home whose advent had always brought a gleam of joy into Cola's life. Nino Dori was in the diligence which was slowly breasting the hill.

Nino's eyes were brilliant, they were so full of joy and sunshine that a passer-by going down the hill nodded and smiled with pleasure, saying lustily, "I need not ask how the world goes with you, Nino? I see success in your face!"

Nino laughed outright, crying, "Thanks for the good omen and a happy journey to you."

The man went on at a long swinging pace down the hill, and the diligence horses strained on their upward way.

It was not wonderful that Nino looked joyous. The time had come to which he had looked forward with the one great longing of



his life. He never even dreamt of any obstacle arising in his path. Colomba had always pined for a wider sphere than this little mountain home. It had come to him through his own strong energy to offer her this emancipation, to carry her away to a new life full of brightness and variety, and altogether enriched and completed by his own great overpowering love.

He would be so good to her. She should be his princess, his queen. He knew his own great genius, he knew that every day the world would recognise it more and more, and that the way to wealth lay before him. He never considered that this woman whom he worshipped was wild, untaught, undisciplined, a mere beautiful savage, beside whom even little Pippa was civilised, for she had learnt the discipline of a great city. Something there must have been in Colomba beyond the magnetism of her magnificent beauty, something which had so strangely attracted to her feet two men so vastly superior to herself, so capable of appreciating higher things. What it was, it was very difficult to analyse. There was no tenderness about her, only a wild ungoverned nature. Perhaps the attraction lay in the infinite possibilities and capabilities of such a nature, the very sense of danger, the chance of falling upon something altogether rough and unlovely lending zest to the flight of imaginative conjecture.

Nino was not blind to this danger, but he adored her.

Fortune, hope, love, triumph before him—all so close, within the very grasp of his hand, his feelings overpowered him. He clasped those long slender nervous fingers together, in which lay the secret of his success, and raised his eyes upward as though he would pierce the glory of the sky itself to lay his thanksgiving at the foot of the throne of God.

The Angelus bell was clanging as the diligence put on a spurt at the end of its journey, and with jingle of harness, whoops from the driver, and crackings of whip like pistol shots on the air, they drew up before the inn.

Several of the villagers, men and women, were standing about there, and they gave a little shout of welcome when they saw Nino.

"Nino! Nino Dori has come!" they exclaimed, crowding round him, holding out eager welcoming hands.

Nino sprang to the ground. He had forgotten all now—his own insignificant stature, the deformity which had always seemed to him so terrible, so obvious when he was surrounded by these sturdy sons of the stone quarries. He grasped hand after hand, pleased and gratified by the warmth of their welcome.

"My friends! my good comrades!" he exclaimed. "How are you all? Ha, Carlo! is that you? How are all at home?"

Carlo shook his head roughly and walked away; he did not care to be questioned.

Nino was startled.

"Is anything wrong with Carlo?" he asked, anxiously.

"Wrong? no," cried an old woman who was standing in the background. "But they have all been more or less odd since Colomba's marriage."

"Colomba's marriage?"

What could this strange odd feeling be that came suddenly rushing over Nino's brain. Everything seemed to get thick and indistinct, then blood-red; the world was full of some great hammering noise, everywhere, all round, in the earth, in the air, it could not be only in his head.

"Stand back! Give him air!" said a voice—a voice that sounded very far off. Somebody was supporting him, and he was falling, down, down, down.

"Poor Nino!"

It was a kindly, sympathetic voice that spoke; a hand was unfastening the collar which seemed to suffocate his throat, giving him air, enabling him to breathe again.

Very far off, as in a dream or semi-swoon, he heard voices talking about him.

"What caused this? What is the matter?"

"It is a touch of the sun, a rush of blood to the head, Signor Priore. We must bleed him. It will soon be all right."

"How did it come on? Here, give me the knife, cut this button also. Now dash water on him. See, he is better!"

"It must have been those words; he always loved Colomba well, and——"

A faint shiver passed over the pale face. The Priore, who was supporting Nino's head, spoke gently:

"You are better, my friend? You suffer no pain?"

But Nino could not speak yet. He opened his great, soft, dark eyes, and looked up with a wondering wistfulness in their gaze.

"Drink this!"

They had brought some strong sour red wine. The Priore put it to his lips, and he swallowed it. Presently he came to himself and sat up, looking white as a sheet.

"I am ashamed," he began, trying to rise to his feet, but unable to do so without help from strong hands round him.

"Signor Priore," he faltered.

"My friend! Yes, come with me. It will be best so. We will talk. You are still weak, lean on my arm; come in here. Good friends, leave him with me a little while; I will come out and tell you how he is."

And the good Priore supported him into the inn-parlour, and placed him on a chair.

"Is it true? Is it true?" said Nino, looking up at the priest.

"Yes, my friend, it is true, if you mean that Colomba Bondi is married. I am grieved that you should feel it thus."

Nino had covered his face with his hands. In spite of all his

efforts, his bitter struggle to preserve his manhood, the hot tears rained from his eyes.

"It is a very sad story," said the Priore gravely, "and one which gives me more anxiety than anything that I have known in the place since I first came here. Poor Colomba might have been a happy young wife—your wife perhaps, Nino. Ah, that would have rejoiced my very soul! But as it is——"

"Do not tell me that she is not happy," cried Nino, throwing out his hands with a gesture almost of despair; "I can bear anything but that! Oh, my God, spare me that!"

The Priore sighed. "Happy! Alas, poor Cola is so miserable that we do not know where to turn to comfort her."

"But what is it? To whom is she married? Not to Giorgio or Zei? Any one of them would have been good to her. Tell me the worst!"

"The man whom Colomba married is a gentleman," said the Priore slowly. "He came up to Maiano with a friend of his, a young, very good-looking soldier. They called each other Livio and Gian. The younger of the two, Livio, won the heart of our poor Colomba."

"Yes, yes, and—?"

"They were to be married, sorely against the will of the older man Gian. He said all he could to prevent it, and finally he quarrelled with his friend, and went away, leaving him here alone."

"Yes, yes!"

"Colomba was radiantly happy, and all went well until the wedding-day. The ceremony was done, the Church's rites were completed—they needed but to go up to San Pietro for the civil ceremony—when just as we quitted the church door, Colomba still gaily dressed out in her bridal gown, and her mother's pearls, when post-haste, fast as a man could drive, Gian rushed back upon the scene. He had come to carry off his friend with an order from the colonel for their immediate recall."

"And he went—the coward, the traitor!"

"Yes, he went. The order could only have been disobeyed at the cost of honour. They consulted me. I could do no otherwise than give my reluctant consent to the fact that there could be no disobeying."

"And he? Was it all a ruse? Was he expecting a rescue?"

The Priore's face was sadly troubled. "I do not think so," he answered. "This is the mysterious part of the whole story, the poor boy (he is little more than a boy, so young, so handsome!) was in despair, unutterable despair. But what can one say? I know nothing of his circumstances. He may be dependent on his chances in the army for all I know; I could not have urged him to do what would have ruined them for ever. In this matter it seems to me that this friend Gian, or whatever his name may be, was right—that it was impossible to hesitate."

"But the civil marriage—the legal forms, that—?"

"Was left undone."

Nino looked up at the Priore, his hands were convulsively pressed together. "It is a trick!" he exclaimed, "I have heard of its having been done before! He will claim her as his wife—women know nothing of these things; she has received the blessing of the church, she believes it to be sufficient—perhaps you also believe it to be sufficient?" he almost shouted, catching at the Priore's arm.

"Be calm, Nino," said the Priore quietly; "listen to what I say. It ought to be sufficient. That it has ceased to be so is one of the sins that bring down God's curse on this unhappy land, but I have never called it so. I told Colomba and I told her husband that until they had signed their names before the registrar their marriage was not legal. He has never written to her or sent her news of himself. He has passed out of our lives like a dream—gone, utterly gone, as if he had no existence—"

"And Cola?"

The Priore shrugged his shoulders. He did not know what to say to satisfy the yearning, agonised pity in this man's face. It dawned upon him suddenly, strongly, that Colomba was wonderfully unworthy of such love, such intense solicitude. He could not say that she was bearing well this desperate sorrow and bitter humiliation. He could not describe her fits of ungovernable fury with all around her, her sullen fierce despair, her savage gloom.

"It is a hard trial," he said, and Nino groaned, for there was an intuitive knowledge in his breast of how she was bearing it. He had no illusions on the subject of his love, he knew her as she was, but his strong faithful nature clung to her in such a fashion that her faults affected him no more than the faults of a naughty child affect the love of its mother.

"I will go to her," he said, rising to his feet with some difficulty. "This foolish weakness will soon pass. I—I have been working very hard of late, and a city life is not so strengthening as yours in the mountain air. Is she at home?"

"No," answered the Priore, "she is not at home. It is a sad business, but you will understand it. Our people are not patient. They were tired of her monotonous gloom—her father was harsh to her."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nino. It was almost like physical pain to him that any one should be harsh to her now in her sorrow, her great misery.

"It was better that she should leave Bondi's house; he is a violent man, you know. She is with old Lalla. She had met with an accident through some foolish quarrel with her father."

Nino's teeth clenched. "A blow?" he said.

"Yes, but it need not have been severe but for the fact of a buckle striking her. She is none the worse; indeed, Maddalena tells me that she is better to-day, quieter, more reasonable, poor unhappy child!"

"Have you no idea, no theory even, about this man?"

The Priore threw out his hands. "What can one think?" he said. "That he was called away by necessity I do not for a moment doubt. His despair was perfectly unassumed, I will answer for that. That he has made no sign, must be due to some strange accident. Perhaps his family have got hold of him and compelled him to give her up."

"Impossible!"

"Well, it is only one conjecture out of many! My own most reasonable suspicion is that he is dead, and if so, we shall have no clue, nothing to guide us. We do not even know his name, that would have transpired before the registrar, but as you know——"

Nino passed his hand painfully across his eyes. "It is very strange," he said. "How long ago do you say it was?"

"Six months. It was May when he first came here, they were married in June, and now it is already November."

"I will go to her now," said Nino, brokenly. Six months! All that time he had been working for her so brightly, beginning to see before him dazzling visions of hope fulfilled, revelling in the thought that every day was bringing him nearer to his happiness! All that time she had been already lost to him. It was hard to bear.

Nino wrung the good priest's hand; he did not look up, feeling that kind compassionate eyes might unman him, but he went out to seek Colomba with his head sunk low on his breast.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

LALLA was standing outside her door when Nino came up to it, waiting to stop his entrance. She would allow no one to see her patient that day, she said. Colomba had had a severe wound, had lost much blood; she must be allowed perfect rest, no unnecessary excitement.

Nino acquiesced sorrowfully enough. If it were bad for Colomba to see him, he would not urge it; he accepted the decision of the old hag who had constituted herself village nurse without dispute, and he turned away with a very heavy heart and slow step to seek Maddalena.

Maddalena had always been a good kind friend to him, she would be able to tell him many details that he longed yet dreaded to hear.

Maddalena was at home, she was making bread; she went on busily with her occupation of kneading while she talked to him. Long ago Maddalena had taught herself that to be incessantly occupied, her hands always busy with household work, or distaff and spinning-wheel, was the only way to keep out of her ears the boom of the blasting rocks. Like the murmur of the sea locked up in the heart of a shell, it was never quite absent from her brain.

Her kind sympathetic eyes gave him a sense of refuge and help.

He sat down by the table at which she was working, leaning his head mournfully on his hand.

Nino did not mean to complain, but the words of complaint burst out involuntarily under the touch of sympathy,

"Oh dear Maddalena! why does God send this trial? Why did He let me come too late?"

She shook her head. "Things seem to be all wrong often enough, Nino mine," she said tremulously. "But we know it is only because we cannot understand. God sends it."

"It is very bitter!"

"Patience! who knows? Perhaps he will come back and Cola be happy again."

"But I, Maddalena—I?"

She wiped away a few tears. "We do not matter, Nino, do we? We are quiet, humble souls, who know what it is to take our pain quietly and thank God it is no worse. It does not matter for us."

And Nino accepted her valuation of him, though he could not but be aware of his own genius—a genius that would make all Europe single him out as the finest wood-carver of his day; yet with the most perfect humility he accepted the fact that their pain, his and his companion's, was of no consequence, no account whatever, beside that of this wild undisciplined peasant girl whom they both adored.

"I have not asked much of Heaven," he said bitterly. "Only to take away my own insignificant life now that it is no longer worth living. But such prayers are accounted impious."

"It is a blessing that our good angels never take them up at all," said Maddalena, placing another lump of dough on her kneading-board. "For instance, if I had been taken at my word and allowed to die, who would have looked after my father and the boys? As for you, Nino, to be sure you are not of much use, but all the same one loves those to whom one is accustomed, and no one has ever been such a friend to Cola."

"But now! what can I do now? Oh, Maddalena, my friend, I thought to have taken her home as my wife. I have money now. I have a home."

Maddalena brushed away her tears. "It is a pity," she said. "But do not look so sad; there are others to be had, and Cola would not have made you a good wife. She is too self-willed, too beautiful. She can do nothing, she can neither sew nor cook. In everything I have waited on her hand and foot. I have spoilt her I fear."

"She would have been my queen. You remember Pippa, Maddalena? You have heard me speak of her."

"Yes."

"She would have waited on her, been her slave, her grateful, loving slave."

"Well, well, Nino, all the worst sorrow of this weary world lies in those words of yours and mine—'All this might have been.'"



And she fell to kneading the bread hard and fast, with tremulous work-worn fingers.

Nino did not speak for a moment, absorbed in his own cares ; the under-current of the old sorrow in every word and action of his companion escaped his sympathy.

It is often thus in life. When great sorrow falls on a shrinking mourner, sympathy is all on the alert ; but the days roll on, the sufferer gets broken in to suffering, used to it, he wraps it round with a certain conventional calm and patience, placidity grows into cheerfulness. All the friends and neighbours rejoice, they are relieved that the strain of sympathy is relaxed, no longer drawn upon.

But how is it with the sufferer himself ? The old agony is there, living, burning, eating into all the joy of life. It is so integral, so completely part of himself, that now and then when the never-ceasing pain wells up and betrays itself, he is astonished, pained, thrown back upon himself when he finds that he is not understood. That the grief to him, so real, so living, to his friends has long been dead and buried in forgetfulness.

Nino threw up his hands and cried aloud in a voice of anguish.

"Kind Heaven ! it might have been." Then he leant forward, buried his face in his hands, and burst into a passion of tears.

They were thus—Nino still weeping, Maddalena sorrowfully watching him—when the door was suddenly thrown open.

Nino sprang to his feet, Maddalena started back, for there, framed in by the rough doorway, her tall figure dark against the intense blue of sky and lofty mountain, stood Colomba.

She had wound a white kerchief round her head and over her wounded throat ; she was very pale, so ghastly pale, that a long weal across her forehead stood out with startling distinctness, a blue angry bruise. Maddalena started forward

"Cola !" she exclaimed, "you should not be here. Lalla said you must rest. Oh, my child, my child, what a blow !"

"It is nothing," said Colomba, hastily pushing back her hair. "Let me come in. The room seems dark and whirling round."

Maddalena led her to a chair. She was reeling from weakness and faintness.

"You should be in bed," said her sister tenderly.

Nino had drawn back into the shadow. He was horrified at the change he saw in her. He stood with clenched hands, and teeth set hard.

"Lalla went out," said Colomba, leaning her aching head against her sister. "So I escaped ; she wanted to keep me a prisoner in bed, but I came away. It is nonsense. I heard that Nino had come, and I wanted to see him at once. Nino !"

"I am here, Cola."

"Come forward. I cannot see you. I want to speak to you."

He advanced gently and took her hand in both of his ice-cold hands. She drew away with a little impatient shiver.

"You are very cold," she said.

He could not master himself sufficiently to speak to her calmly. He gnawed his white quivering lips.

"Nino," she cried, with a sudden wild, passionate entreaty in her voice, "I want you to take me away with you—to Florence—to Rome! Anywhere away from here."

"Colomba!" cried Maddalena, horrified.

"You will take me, Nino, will you not? I care not where. I want to go to some great town where I may sit all day long in a window overlooking some wide street, waiting and watching till my husband passes by, and I can——"

"What—what will you do?"

"Kill him!" she hissed out suddenly.

"You talk wildly," said Maddalena. "Cola, this must not go on. See! you have angered all your friends in Maiano; now you will anger Nino also."

Colomba cast a glance at him full of proud confidence. Nino was her slave, nothing that she could ever say or do would drive him from her.

"Ask what you will, Colomba," he said eagerly. "I am your servant—I will do it."

"Then take me away. If I stay here I shall go mad."

"Hush, hush, Colo!" cried her sister. "You are mad already. Do you know what you ask?"

"It will be all right," said Nino, hoarsely. "Pippa will receive her gladly; she can lodge with her. There is no difficulty."

"And you will leave me, Cola? Go away among strange folk in your sorrow like this?"

"You will be well rid of me; you cannot even pretend to regret it," said Colomba, harshly. Maddalena wrung her hands.

"But what will the world say? What will my father say?"

"There can be nothing to say," cried Nino, eagerly. "I will take her to Pippa. It is but fifteen hours in the diligence. Pippa will receive her with open arms."

"Arrange it as you will," said Cola, indifferently. She shaded her eyes with both hands, trying to steady herself, and control the vague swaying of all things animate and inanimate around her.

"Only take me away," she repeated.

"With the help of God I will be to her the most true and loyal brother," said Nino. Maddalena put out her hard, work-worn hand, and pressed it with a pressure on his shoulder, strong in proportion to her feeling. She could not speak.

"Cola," said Nino, breaking silence, "when do you wish to start?"

"To-morrow," she answered, dreamily.

"Impossible!" cried her sister; "you are too weak."

Then Colomba rallied all her powers. "To-morrow, Nino," she said. "I am glad it is settled. I shall sleep to-night."

She rose to her feet, staggering a little as she did so, and turned to leave the room. Maddalena threw open her arms.

"Cola, my darling, my child, will you not stay with me to-night? Oh, what shall I do without you?"

"No," said Colomba, "I will not stay. I shall be a good riddance to all here."

She would not see her sister's outstretched arms and streaming eyes. She put her aside and went out, touching the walls and door to steady her steps.

"Nino, Nino!" cried Maddalena, piteously. "Is she heartless—quite heartless?"

Nino still believed in the ideal of his artistic nature.

"Not heartless," he said, brokenly—"heart-broken."

*To be continued.)*

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### WHITE WINGS.

I LAY me down in time of woe,  
Sure that my soul will fly  
Into a land where it will know  
No misery.

Thy white wings, O my angel! keep  
All terror from me whilst I sleep.

I lay me down in time of bliss,  
Sure that my soul will fly  
Into a land where it will miss  
No ecstasy.

Thy white wings, O my angel! keep  
My treasures for me whilst I sleep.

I lay me down by night or day,  
Sure that however rude  
May be the thorns upon my way,  
Whatever is, is good.

Thy white wings, O my angel! keep  
Me safely, do I wake or sleep.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

## OF MODERATION.

ON moderation we have touched in treating of several subjects ; but a few short paragraphs may here be added. Moderation is to the practical man what the laws of proportion and harmony are to the artist. It is the principle of means and ends, the law of economy, the rule of moving along the lines of least resistance. Never waste power ; your reserve force is always the better increased as a store against sudden emergencies. And the idea can be applied in many ways. Sir Arthur Helps has well said that to overstate your case is far worse than to understate it. Never threaten and fail to act. Never make large promises, and fully fulfil all that you promise. Be frank, but be not too frank. Distinguish between friends and acquaintances, and let the golden mean be your standard. On moderation in this regard Guicciardini may be quoted :—

“A frank and liberal nature doth please universally, and it is in itself a generous thing ; yet sometime it doth hurt a man : on the other hand, dissimulation is useful ; but it is odious, and hath a taste of baseness, and is only needful through the evil natures of others. Wherefore I know not which is to be chosen ; I think that the one may be used ordinarily, and yet the other not abandoned ; that is, in thine ordinary and common course of living to use the first in such wise, as that thou gainest the name of frankness ; and, nevertheless, in certain cases of importance, to use dissimulation, which is so much the more useful, and doth succeed the better to one who doth thus live, inasmuch as, through having a name for the contrary, it is more easily believed in him. In conclusion, I do not applaud him who lives continually in dissimulation and with artifice ; but I excuse him who doth sometimes use it.”

Bacon too has some good counsel on this point :—

“To say truth, nakedness is uncomely in mind as well as in body ; and it addeth no small reverence to men’s manners and actions if they be not altogether open. As for talkers and futile persons, they are vain and credulous withal ; for he that talketh what he knoweth will also talk what he knoweth not. Therefore set it down that a habit of secrecy is both polite and moral. And in this part it is good, that a man’s face give his tongue leave to speak ; for the discovery of a man’s self, by the tracks of his countenance, is a great weakness, and betraying by how much it is many times more marked and believed than a man’s words.”

And, on this point, Cotton, in his *Essays*, has a neat sentence :—

“He that openly tells his friends all that he thinks of them, must

expect that they will secretly tell his enemies much that they do *not* think of him."

Therefore let the reader observe moderation in his confidences as well as in his more open talk. For the worst of it is that too much is seldom enough. "Pumping after your bucket is full," says Julius Hare, "prevents it keeping so." Commit yourself by indiscreet speech once, and it lands you in a score of further indiscretions. So too in many other things than talking. Act therefore on the counsel: Say little; do and have done. The former is far the easier.

A. H. JAPP, LL.D.



#### PARTED.

THE wind is shrieking round the house,  
It shakes the young leaves from the tree  
It breaks the blossomed orchard boughs,  
And sets the trim-trained creeper free;  
It wails across the lonely moor,  
It beats against your window-pane;  
It lays rough hands upon your door,  
And says I shall not come again.

Sitting alone, you listen, dear,  
And, empty-hearted, sigh and sigh;  
You think how green June was last year,  
How golden-glorious was July;  
You think of all the words I said,  
Under the trees a year ago;  
Now that the wind wails overhead  
You wish you had not answered "No."

O Love, my Love, I may not come  
For many nights of wind and rain;  
It will be long ere I come home,  
But yet I shall come home again.  
I shall come home across the moor  
Some happy golden August day,  
And find you knitting by your door,  
And then—you will not say me "Nay."

E. NESBIT.

## THE WITCH'S SPELL.

MISTRESS O'Mally was a terrible old woman—a hard, cruel, wicked, terrible old woman. She had ruled at Castle O'Mally ever since her girlhood ; and she had ruled with a rod of iron. Her people feared her with a blind, unreasoning fear, and hated her with a blind, unreasoning hate : and none among them hated and feared her more perfectly than did her forlorn young kinswoman, Norah O'Mally. Norah had spent as many of her twenty years as she could remember at Castle O'Mally ; and many a time had she been punished for a childish fault by a beating from Mistress O'Mally herself ; and many a time had she repented of such juvenile short-comings in the dark dungeons under the castle. It had been a terrible childhood, followed by a dreary girlhood ; and yet it would have been difficult to find a more exquisitely beautiful form than that which was the earthly tement of poor Norah's crushed and tortured spirit. Masses of red-gold hair crowned the queenly little head, which (if it had a fault) seemed almost too small for the tall and graceful figure ; while Norah's eyes, as dark as night and as mysterious, sent a thrill through every heart which they took the trouble to look into. But these wonderful orbs had a gift above and beyond their beauty ; they possessed a remarkable power of compelling whomsoever they chose to do their bidding—a power which nowadays would be called mesmeric or hypnotic, but which then, in that wild and primitive region, was considered as nothing less than witchcraft. Mistress Bridget O'Mally was fully aware of her young kinswoman's weird gift, and would gladly have given the two ferrety eyes out of her cruel old head for a pair like Norah's : failing this, she made Norah use this power as she (Bridget) willed ; and the poor girl was far too much afraid of her hard taskmistress to even dream of disobeying her.

Now it came to pass, one bitter winter's day, that two snow-bound travellers sought shelter at Castle O'Mally, finding it impossible to push further through the deep drifts which threatened to bury them alive : and Mistress O'Mally, for a wonder, received them graciously, and set before them the best that she could offer, and pressed them to stay with her till the snow should abate and the wild roads be passable again.

The strangers were two officers, Captain Lennox and Captain McBean : the former as superbly handsome a young man as one could wish to see ; the latter a somewhat disreputable old soldier very much the worse for wear. Such were the travellers who claimed the hospitality of Castle O'Mally : and (which is not to be wondered at) both fell in love with Norah O'Mally at first sight. Which sudden awakening of the tender passion did not escape the



lynx eye of the mistress of the castle, but served to add fuel to the already lighted fire of her hatred for and jealousy of her fair cousin's youth and beauty : so the cruel old woman laid her fiendish plans accordingly. That snowy day which brought the two strangers to Castle O'Mally was the birthday of happiness to Norah : she had never known before what it was to feel young and glad and joyous ; but by the time that she and Henry Lennox had looked into one another's eyes and listened to one another's voices for a whole winter's evening, she had formed a fairly accurate idea of what perfect happiness was like.

Norah acted as Mistress O'Mally's maid, and when she had concluded her duties for that night, and was ready to repair to her own little vault of a chamber, she was recalled by her cousin, who said :

"Girl, I have a task for you to perform to-morrow."

"What is it?" asked Norah, with the blind submission that it was her custom to accord to her tyrant's behests.

The sharp eyes of Bridget O'Mally twinkled maliciously.

"You have got to use your witch power," she said, "and make Captain Lennox believe that I am young and beautiful. For he is the finest man that I have ever seen, and I have made up my mind to marry him."

The wonderful black eyes grew dim with fear and horror.

"Oh, not that, not that, Cousin Bridget!" cried the girl; "anything but that."

Mistress O'Mally laughed a dry little laugh.

Then Norah fell on her knees before her cousin, and besought her with bitter tears not to insist upon anything so cruel, so inhuman.

Mistress O'Mally continued to enjoy her laugh.

"You fool!" she cried, "do you think that you are going to have it all your own way with that pretty baby face of yours? Do you think I cannot see that you have already given your silly heart to this man, and that for the present his soft head is turned by your empty beauty? But understand that from to-morrow he is mine, and that it is you who will give me the priceless gift of your handsome lover's love. Ha! ha! ha!" and the old woman fairly shook with her fiendish amusement.

"I will *not* do it!" cried Norah, defiance taking the place of despair.

"Won't you?" giggled Mistress O'Mally. "And have you forgotten what it feels like to be flogged, and how cosy the dungeons are afterwards, and how none of my people would dare to interfere if I chose to starve you to death in there? But if your memory is short, my pretty child, and has forgotten all these trifling little details, you will soon be reminded of them, and I hardly think you will ever forget them again."

The unfortunate girl trembled, and lifted tearful eyes to her tormentor's jeering face; for well she knew that her cousin's were no

empty threats, but that all this and more could Mistress O'Mally do to her, and not one of the servants would dare to interfere or to tell afterwards what diabolical cruelty had done to death the defenceless orphan. So, fixing one look of unutterable despair on Bridget's hateful face, Norah rose from her knees, feeling that resistance to that inflexible will was impossible.

"If you are so anxious to have a lover," sneered Mistress O'Mally, "you can turn your attention to Captain McBean. He is in love with you already, my beauty."

"I hate him," sobbed Norah, with righteous indignation: "he is a wicked, horrid, nasty old man!"

"I quite agree with you," laughed Bridget sleepily, "but you shall marry him all the same, or my name isn't Bridget O'Mally. You can go now," added the old fiend; "I feel tired and drowsy, and want to go to sleep and dream about my handsome lover. So good-night, and pleasant dreams to you about Captain McBean, my sweet birdie!"

And poor Norah left her cousin's room with a tempest of silent rage in her tortured young heart.

The next morning Mistress O'Mally was up betimes, and drove Norah downstairs before her to do her dreadful bidding. The girl had not slept at all during the night, and there were great black rings round her beautiful eyes; but what cared old Bridget for the sorrows of women younger and fairer than herself? The two ladies entered the great hall of the castle together, and Mistress O'Mally perceived the object of her affections seated by the fire. He rose politely at the entrance of the ladies, but Bridget did not fail to note, with a throb of anger, that though his civil words were addressed to her, his admiring eyes sought Norah.

"Do my bidding, girl!" she exclaimed, below her breath; and the girl, feeling the impotence of opposition, fixed her wonderful eyes full on the innocent victim. The strong man sank back at once into his chair, and his glassy stare showed that Norah's hypnotic power had done its work. Then in a mechanical voice the younger Miss O'Mally proceeded to say the words which her tyrant dictated.

"You see Mistress Bridget O'Mally," she began, pointing to the hideous old woman beside her.

"Yes," replied a hollow voice, most unlike the usual cheerful tones of Henry Lennox.

"She is young and beautiful," continued Norah; "and you love her with all your heart. You are wild with love for her, and you will marry her within a week from now. Do you understand?"

"I understand," answered the unearthly voice of the victim. "I love Mistress Bridget O'Mally with all my heart, and will marry her within a week from now."

Then Norah woke her unconscious subject and went out of the room, leaving him and his elderly admirer together.

For a moment the captain looked dazed, and then, as his glance fell on the old woman standing beside him, an expression of such admiration animated his features as it was impossible to misread. He rose at once, and took her skinny hand into his strong one.

"How are you this morning, dear lady?" he inquired tenderly.

"Very well, thank you," giggled Bridget, with delight at this unwonted solicitation for her well-being. "And yourself, Captain?"

"Oh, I am all right," replied the soldier; "but I think our hard journey through the snow must have wearied me somewhat, for I have actually been asleep again since I came downstairs—asleep and dreaming of you," he added, gazing into the wrinkled face with such passionate devotion that Mistress O'Mally felt inclined to scream for joy at the success of her diabolical scheme.

"What did you dream about me?" asked Bridget, with an assumption of arch coquetry, which would have been revolting to any man in his senses.

"I hardly dare to tell you." And the brave soldier fairly trembled with fear of his idol's displeasure.

But Mistress O'Mally coaxed and cajoled until she got her own way.

"Well, if you insist upon my telling you, I (whose highest honour and happiness consist in obeying your lightest command) cannot say you nay," said the captain at last. "I dreamed that I loved you madly—that you and you alone were the lady of my choice; and in my dream I swore that I would win you as my bride, and that ere many days had passed. And listen, darling," he continued, seizing both her hands and drawing her nearer to him, "when I awoke and saw you standing beside me, I knew that my dream had come true, and that henceforth I could never find happiness apart from you. I know I am a rough soldier, dear one, unfit to mate with your sweet beauty; but won't you try to love me a little, Bridget, because I love you so much?"

Then Mistress O'Mally dropped her wicked old head on to the captain's broad shoulder, while he covered her sly face with kisses, and whispered in her ear such nonsense as only lovers talk. Truly Norah's spell had been all too potent for the simple-minded, unsuspecting warrior—alas for him!

Mistress Bridget was the first to seriously take up the parable again.

"Captain," she began; but was stopped by the kisses of the infatuated swain.

"Hush, hush, my pretty one!" he whispered. "You must never call me that again—you must say *Harry*."

"Harry, then," giggled the lady fair.

"Say, *my own dear Harry*," commanded the bewitched wooer.

"My own dear Harry," repeated the wicked old witch, with infantine obedience.

"Well, sweetheart, what is it?"

"Don't you think we might have some breakfast?" suggested the lady, who had reached an age when no love-making, be it never so charming, could stand her in stead of meat and drink.

Her lover's face fell somewhat at this mundane interruption to his day-dream; but he submitted to his lady's will.

"First tell me that you love me," he entreated.

"I love you," shrieked Mistress O'Mally, flinging her withered arms round her lover's stalwart neck in a transport of fiendish joy.

And then the twain went off to take their breakfast, and to break to the other two members of the party what they had done.

The next few days seemed, to Mistress O'Mally and her gallant soldier, to fly by on the wings of the wind: he was so completely enthralled by the spell which had been cast upon him, that he had neither eyes nor ears for any one but his Bridget; and she, who had never had a lover before, was so intoxicated with joy at the sight of so brave a wooer at her feet, that she was simply beside herself with senile delight. But though to the normal eye she was even more repulsive in this amorous mood than she had been in her former malicious one, the captain was blind to all her imperfections, and seemed day by day to become more infatuated. He insisted upon fixing an immediate date for the wedding, and he had no difficulty in inducing his lady-love to agree to this arrangement. In consequence of this absorption of the lovers in one another, the gentleman's brother-officer and the lady's young kinswoman were left entirely to their own or each other's devices, whichever they pleased. Captain Lennox just now had no thoughts for anything save love-making; and Captain McBean was reduced to pretty much the same state; so the wintry days did not hang heavy on the gallant warriors' hands, nor were the gentlemen at all anxious for the imprisoning snow to melt, and so release them from their respective ladies' sides. They were happy enough, but not so Mistress O'Mally. She was filled with rage to think that the love and admiration, which she found so delightful and which were only hers by deceit and sorcery, were Norah's by simple right of her youth and beauty; and she swore an oath that when once her adored lover was united to her by marriage (a bond which the withdrawal of Norah's spell would be powerless to break), she would turn the hapless girl out of her doors for ever, and never permit that beautiful face to be seen inside Castle O'Mally again, lest her husband's now distorted fancy should return to its first and fairer love. Wherein Mistress Bridget showed her accustomed wisdom of the serpent, unalloyed in her case by any adulteration of the harmless dove.

The wedding-day dawned; and Mistress Bridget commanded her old chaplain, Father Paul (who feared her as he feared his ghostly enemy) to unite her to the man of her choice in the little chapel attached to the castle; and she further ordained (out of a spirit of

fiendish cruelty) that Norah should be her bridesmaid, so that the girl might have the anguish of seeing her rich kinswoman mated to the man whom she herself loved. The bridegroom had for his best man his friend and brother-officer. Norah's face was as white as death during the strange marriage, but otherwise she made no sign of what she was feeling. When the ceremony was concluded, and "I, Henry," had taken "thee, Bridget," for every vicissitude of human life, and the twain were united past all putting asunder, the bride turned round to her beautiful bridesmaid and thus addressed her :

"And now, my fair cousin, that I have secured a companion whose society is all that I could desire, I shall henceforth dispense with yours, and shall therefore expect you to leave my castle this very day. But—in that spirit of consideration which I have always shown you—I should be sorry to send you out into the world alone and unprovided for : so I will have you married at once to the gentleman who now stands beside you, so that the pleasing duty of providing for you (which has hitherto devolved upon me) will now be transferred to his broader shoulders."

Norah turned if possible a shade paler than she was before, and gasped out :

"Oh, no, no ! It is scandalous to dispose of me as if I were a bale of goods."

The bride took no notice of this appeal, but turned from the bridesmaid to the best man.

"This lady is as penniless as she is (according to your befooled taste) handsome. Have you any objection to wedding her here and now ?"

"Not the least," laughed the captain in triumph ; "in fact, it is the dearest wish of my heart to do so."

"Then, Father Paul, marry this couple at once," commanded the mistress of Castle O'Mally ; and the poor little chaplain—knowing by experience that that particular tone of her voice meant mischief—hastened to perform his tyrant's bidding.

Norah did not further rebel—what was the use when all of them were against her?—but went through her part of the programme looking more like an exquisite marble statue than a living, breathing woman. When the second pair were united as securely as the first had been, the elder bride again took the word into her mouth :

"And now, my sweet cousin, your bridegroom and yourself will make yourselves scarce as speedily as possible, for my husband and I prefer to be left alone ; and you doubtless will also have much to say to the husband of your—can I say *choice* ?" and she laughed at her malicious little joke with a laugh that was full of triumph.

Then at last the marble statue awoke into a real woman, her face alight with scornful indignation.

"I will go willingly," she exclaimed in Gaelic, "from a house wherein I have known nought but misery all these years : but before

I go I have a word to say to you, Cousin Bridget. You made my childhood miserable and my girlhood desolate by your cruel ways; and you further decided to blight my womanhood by uniting me to a man whom I had told you I loathed. What had I done that you should hate me so mercilessly and punish me so maliciously? Have I not done your bidding all these years? then why should you ordain that so hideous a lot should be mine? But stop!"

And now—before Bridget could prevent her—Norah made the movement whereby she released from her hypnotic spell those who had lain under it. And lo! The first-wedded couple gazed at each other for an instant as if transfixed; and then simultaneously exclaimed!

"You abominable old fright!"

"You hideous old frump!"

For the bridegroom suddenly discovered that he had wedded an ugly old woman; and the bride perceived that she was married to Captain Henry McBean.

"Yes," continued Norah, still in Gaelic, while the twain stood gazing at each other in horror; "it was my only escape from the cruel fate which you had devised for me, so you have no one but yourself to thank for what has happened. Was I going to sacrifice not only myself (which was a small matter), but the man that I loved, to your diabolical device? No—a thousand times no! Therefore I made a desperate resolve. When—on that night—you said that you felt sleepy, you were really falling under my spell; and I then commanded you to love devotedly the first man whom you should see on coming downstairs next morning: and I took care that Captain Henry McBean, and not Captain Henry Lennox, was the first to meet your gaze. The rest you know, Mistress McBean."

During Norah's speech (whereof neither of the bridegrooms could understand a word) Bridget had been trembling from head to foot with baffled rage and disappointed malice; but at last she succeeded in giving utterance to the fury which possessed her.

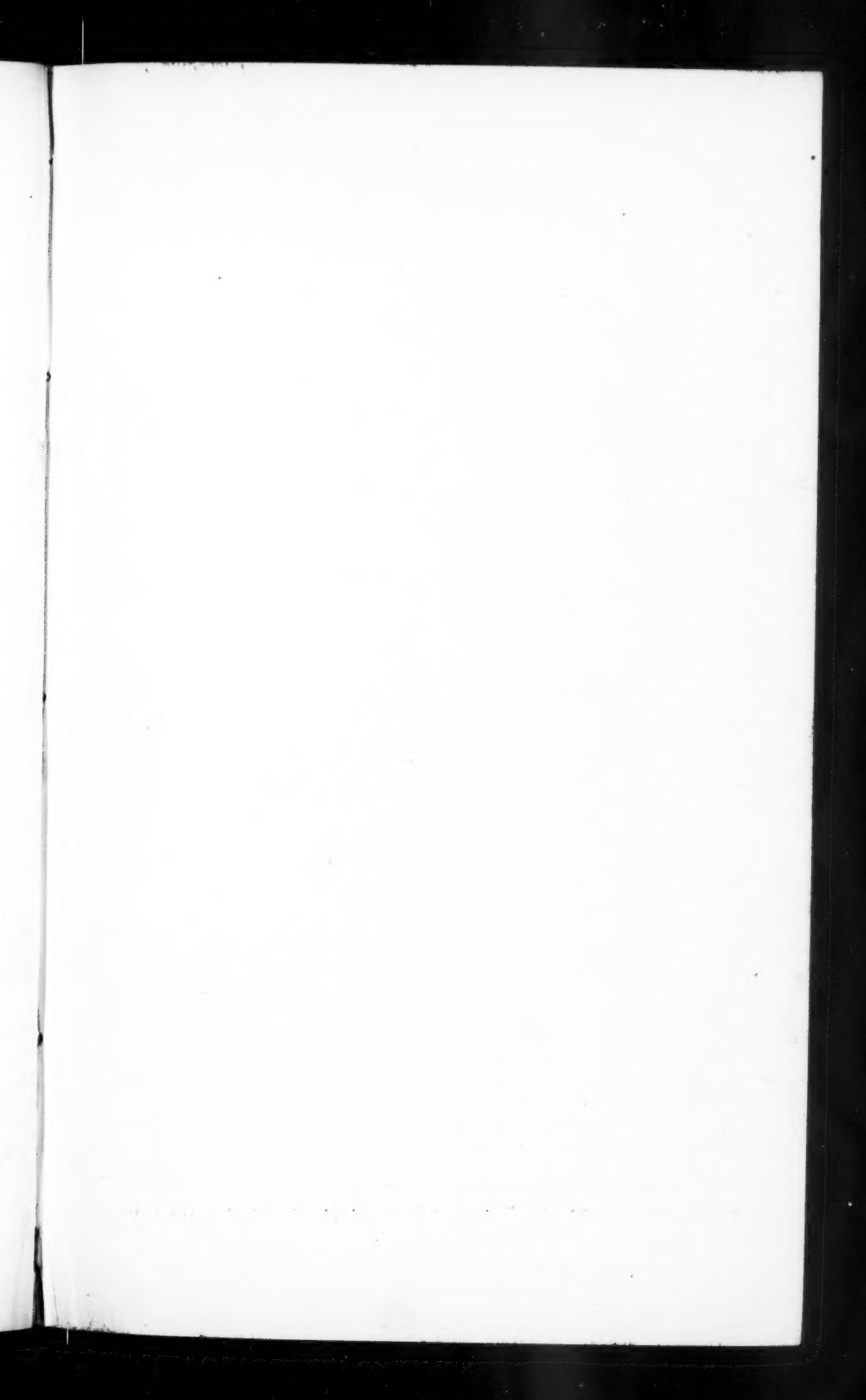
"You minx! you wretch! you hussy!" she screamed, "how dare you trick me so? But I'll have my revenge. I'll scratch your wicked eyes out, you young viper, and leave you to rot in my darkest dungeon, you ill-conditioned serpent, you——"

And she was rushing forward with outstretched, claw-like fingers to put her horrible threat into execution, when Captain Lennox's strong arm held her back.

"Gently, madam—gently!" he cried; "you dare not lay a finger upon Mrs. Lennox. Remember that she is the wife of an English officer!"

ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER.







"SHE IS EXTREMELY PRETTY," SAID SIR FREDERIC; "YOU DO NOT IN THE LEAST RESEMBLE HER."

